

**Conceptions of Academic Freedom in English  
Faith-Based Universities and University  
Colleges**

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## **Abstract**

Academic freedom is a contested concept, and in the present climate in higher education, is currently considered by many academics to be under threat nationally and internationally. This thesis focuses on how academic freedom is conceived and addressed within the context of a particular sector of higher education. The focus of the study was the fourteen English members of the Cathedrals Group, which is a distinctive sector in higher education, as the members are universities and university colleges with a historical faith-base. Formerly established as Church teacher-training colleges, these institutions have latterly evolved and gained university college and university status. Within higher education, faith-based institutions differ from secular universities and university colleges in that they have a historical relationship with their founding Church, which continues to be a part of their institutional identity to the present day. The reason for selecting this group of institutions was that faith-based institutions are sometimes criticised for placing limits on academic freedom. The empirical data for this research was gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with eleven senior managers and eleven academics. The findings indicated that although there were isolated instances where academics had experienced restrictions, for the majority of those interviewed there was no tension between the institutions' faith-base and their academic freedom. The Christian foundation was not an important consideration, had little effect upon their academic work, and academics' definitions and experiences of academic freedom were reported as no different from traditional conceptions of academic freedom. One of the possible explanations offered for this is that in their progression towards achieving university status, the institutions have become increasingly secularised and therefore for many academics the possibility of any limitations to academic freedom in relation to the faith-base of their institution was not an issue for consideration.

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## **2000 Word Statement**

Before enrolling to study for a Doctorate in Education at the Institute of Education, my professional focus was upon my role as a senior lecturer in Early Years education, within the Primary Education Department at my university. At this particular time in my professional development, my interests were in the pedagogy of young children's literacy learning with a focus on how young children develop concepts and skills in reading, writing and oracy.

Engaging in the process of re-reading and reflecting upon my assignments in order to complete this statement has made me aware of the immense personal development and changes that have taken place, both professionally and intellectually as I have continued with my academic studies. My interest in higher education rather than Early Years education, which has developed during my work on the EdD programme, has resulted in a change of professional focus and academic interests, and I have not pursued one line of enquiry throughout my work. I have therefore taken a sequential approach, using my assignments as a framework, to enable me to reflect upon my development with regard to my understanding of professional enquiry and research, which has culminated in the completion of my final thesis.

### **The first two years**

I found the initial two years of the programme to be intellectually stimulating and a challenge to the ways in which I thought about my role as an academic and teacher educator. In my first assignment for Foundations of Professionalism, I reflected upon the changing nature of Early Years professionalism. In particular, I focused upon how the relative autonomy in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, prior to the Education Reform Act (1988) had been eroded by successive government initiatives, and in particular the 'third-way' plethora of policies introduced by the New Labour government after the election in May 1997. The central argument of my assignment was that Early Years professionalism had a distinctive professional identity, but that government initiatives had resulted in the construction of a professionalism that I described as 'fragile'. I

considered four aspects that lead to this fragility. The continuing historical legacy of marketisation in the Thatcherite period, the fragility of a broader feminised workforce, the fragility of the core concept of edu-care and the fragility caused by constant policy churn in Early Years legislation.

Reading, researching and writing this assignment allowed me to reflect upon my own understandings of what it meant to be an Early Years professional and how government policies and initiatives had shaped and changed the nature of my work as a head teacher and latterly as a Senior Lecturer in Education within a new university. Completing this assignment also led me to deepen my understanding of how wider political issues impacted upon education as a whole, beyond my own particular area of expertise.

The requirement for my second assignment for Methods of Enquiry 1 was to apply the knowledge and understanding of research methods developed through the taught sessions to a hypothetical research project, which I then actually implemented for my third assignment, Methods of Enquiry 2. These two assignments represented a departure from my focus on young children and were based on my growing interest in research methodology, and in particular, that academics sometimes disagreed about research methods. This was evident from some internal research conferences at my own university where different professors, often heatedly, debated the merits and demerits of particular approaches to research and from some of the lectures in the taught sessions at the IOE.

Against this background, questions had been asked at the political level by Hargreaves (1996) on teaching as a research-based profession and whether educational research was good value for money and Blunkett (2000), regarding the links between research and government policy. My research question for both assignments: ‘What nascent theories of educational research are structuring the thinking of Primary Education Teacher Trainers?’ was based upon my developing understanding of how at a theoretical level distinct epistemological beliefs influenced methodologies in academic research. This project required me to think carefully about a precise focused research question and investigate a suitable research design and methodology to generate data for analysis. I decided upon a methodology involving semi-structured interviews with ten members of my department



to determine their attitudes and understanding towards the notion of 'truth' in research. These assignments caused me to consider the threads of thinking behind articles that I had read in the British Journal of Educational Research and the British Journal of the Sociology of Education on the contested nature of educational research and other literature focusing upon research methodologies, (Delamont, 2001; Hammersley, 1999, 2000, 2001; Gomm, 2000; Oliver 2001; Stronach and MacLure, 1997). Researching and completing this assignment expanded my thinking and learning far beyond my original professional focus on young children's learning into what for me was a completely new area of study.

My final assignment for Contemporary Educational Policy involved an analysis of the Government's Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' and its implications for teachers' professionalism and changing work practices. Following the theme of my first assignment, my argument was that the government's proposals were further blurring the distinction between the teacher's role as educator and carer. With a focus on improving the lives of children, young people and their families (DfES, 2004), I considered that this implied a shift away from education as an entity in itself towards an additional role for teachers as social workers. The concept of education and care, once the domain of Early Years education, was to be extended through Primary to Secondary education, thus radically changing the nature of the teacher's role as educator.

### **The institution focused study**

Planning and completing this assignment marked a complete change in the direction of my academic interests and studies. As the context for my work as a Senior Lecturer was within a Church Foundation University, my study focused upon what was distinctive about my institution in relation to the government's policies of widening participation and inclusion in higher education. With the target to raise the proportion of eighteen to thirty year olds participating in higher education to fifty percent by the year 2010, widening participation and inclusion were foremost in the strategic planning of all universities. I felt that this focus was of particular interest at that time for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there was internal and national debate within the Christian universities

and colleges with regard to the management of the institutions' faith base within a climate of an increasing diversity of race and religion. Secondly, these institutions were competing for students with other secular universities in order to remain financially viable and their Governing Bodies needed to position their institutions advantageously within the market place. Thirdly, there were divisions between the member institutions as to what constituted the concept of a 'religious ethos'. The influence of the Church on the governance of the institutions within the proposals for wider participation and inclusion might appear to be of no consequence, but there could be tensions between highlighting the religious dimension of the institutions as a particular marketing strategy whilst also emphasising widening participation and inclusion.

Prior to gaining university status in 2005, the Christian ethos had been very low key, but I became aware that elements of the faith-base were coming to the fore and bonds with the Church of England had been strengthened in the Governing Body, and senior management. Some examples of this were that Alpha courses involving an evangelical approach to the introduction of the basics of the Christian faith were offered to the students during admissions week and the Governors' Annual Report Meeting that year was lead by a prominent member of the Church of England and included prayers. The Governors also made a contentious decision not to continue the celebration of civil marriages at the university after the same-sex couple Civil Partnerships Act (2004) came into force.

In this study, my main research question was 'What are the tensions between Christian principles and policies of widening participation and inclusion in a university with a Christian Foundation? My research methodology had two complementary approaches. The first was through carrying out semi-structured interviews with the President of the Student's Union, two Heads of Department, the Dean of Faculty, the Equal Opportunities Officer, the university Chaplain and the Vice-Chancellor. The second was an analysis of documentary evidence from a range of sources, including minutes of meetings, reports produced by the Church of England and the Council of Church Colleges and Universities and media literature. The evidence from this research indicated that there were tensions

with the university's original mission statement in relation to staff which was acknowledged by the Vice Chancellor and the university Chaplain. There was a recognition that not all members of staff could subscribe to an overarching Christian commitment and subsequently the mission statement was revised. The vast majority of the senior managers felt that the challenges facing the university in terms of widening participation were no different from other universities. They supported the view that the university was caring and inclusive and that the Church had been in the forefront of inclusive practices. However many tensions were identified and characterised by those who had responsibility for promoting equal opportunities, including the mission statement, the absence of a shared understanding of the meaning of the Church foundation, and a concern that the emphasis on the distinctive Christian identity of the institution was exclusionary to other faiths.

Completing my IFS resulted in a complete change in my professional research interests and the academic focus of my work within the university. Over the first four years of my Ed.D studies, my professional interests had changed from Early Years education to a much broader academic awareness of research and policy in higher education. Carrying out the research for the IFS also brought me into contact with a range of academics beyond my faculty whom I would not have encountered otherwise. In addition, in consultation with my head of department, I widened the scope of my work and contributed to the development and validation of a new Education Studies Degree. I was also invited to extend my work and take part in the supervision of teachers who were undertaking research as Masters Level and become the departmental representative on the university's Research Committee. These changes and opportunities in my professional work would not have taken place without the professional academic development that occurred as a result of my continuing studies for the Ed.D. In terms of other activities in my university, I now feel confident that I have the knowledge and understanding to contribute to a variety of formal and informal gatherings where colleagues discuss their research interests and present papers. I have in fact shared the results of my IFS research in two internal presentations at the university, which has raised the level of debate concerning the Christian foundation and wider issues in higher education. Conducting

research into areas which were potentially sensitive raised important ethical issues regarding guarantees of anonymity, particularly within the requirements of the IFS as my study focused upon one institution. For this reason, I requested that my study was sequestered under the Institute of Education's regulations, and subsequently I have paid careful attention to ethical issues in my final thesis.

The focus of my thesis on academic freedom has evolved from my IFS. In a conversation with one of the participants after completing the interview, it became evident that for some academic freedom was also a contentious issue at the university. Academic freedom was outside the parameters of my research at that time, but this incident coupled with suggestions made by my examiner for the IFS informed my decision to continue with my research into faith-based universities and to explore how academic freedom is conceived and addressed. Whilst my IFS focused upon one institution with a faith-base, my thesis encompasses fourteen similar institutions with a very specific research focus which is relevant to this particular sector of higher education and higher education as a whole.

# Chapter One

## The Rationale and Context for the Thesis

### Introduction

Academic freedom is a controversial and contested concept within higher education generally, and particularly in faith based universities in the United States. Definitions of academic freedom vary considerably. For example Barnett condenses his definition of academic freedom into one single principle: ‘that academic pursuits, carried out in academic settings, by academic persons, should be ultimately directed by those academic persons’ (1988, p. 91). However Tight offers a much more comprehensive definition in which he includes references to worthwhile knowledge and academics’ responsibilities.

Academic freedom refers to the freedom of individual academics to study, teach, research and publish without being subject to or causing undue interference. Academic freedom is granted in the belief that it enhances the pursuit and application of worthwhile knowledge, and as such is supported by society through the funding of academics and their institutions. Academic freedom embodies an acceptance by academics of the need to encourage openness and flexibility in academic work, and of their accountability to each other and society in general (Tight, 1988, p. 132).

For my thesis, I have identified academic freedom within the context of English faith-based institutions as an area that merits further investigation. My thesis seeks to explore how academic freedom is conceived and addressed in Church affiliated universities and university colleges in England. Subsidiary questions enquire into senior managers’ and academics’ understandings of academic freedom in relation to the institutions’ Christian mission in terms of how academic freedom is ensured, whether the faith-base enhances academic freedom, and if there are any formal or informal restrictions, how these are resolved.

This research is particularly relevant at the present time because there is currently an upsurge of interest in academic freedom. Academic freedom is considered to be under

threat across the board, nationally and internationally, and prominent academics have been involved in raising the profile of the importance of academic freedom in a variety of public arenas. At the same time, with the formation of the Cathedrals Group (2009) in the United Kingdom, the fourteen English universities and university colleges with a Church foundation have formed a coalition and are reasserting the ‘crucial role that religious faith, faith in God, can play in shaping education, not least higher education today’ (Nichols, 2009). This group of institutions are distancing themselves from their more established secular counterparts, within a competitive market in higher education, with an emphasis on institutional faith-based distinctiveness and a clearly definable Christian identity. There has been lively debate about the position of academic freedom in relation to the Church related university colleges and universities, which has been raised as a contentious issue in the past in relation to certain perceived limitations relating to maintaining the Christian ethos and their links with the Church.

The emergence of English Church affiliated universities, alongside a growing focus on academic freedom, makes this study particularly relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The current rise of a focus upon academic freedom**

In higher education generally, following on from the 9/11 attacks in the USA, there have been fears that government legislation in relation to terrorism on both sides of the Atlantic has led to an erosion of academic freedom. In the United Kingdom, the profile of academic freedom was raised with the formation of Academics for Academic Freedom in 2006. Latterly, it is evident that academic freedom is currently under scrutiny within the academy as it has been the focus for presentations at a variety of high profile discussion groups in the United Kingdom and conferences with international audiences.

In 2010, Universities UK set up a working group to investigate how best to protect academic freedom within the present climate in higher education of ‘geo-political conflict, racial and religious tension and violent extremism’ (Universities UK 2010). During the same year, Eric Barendt presented his views on academic freedom and the law to an international law discussion group at Chatham House (Royal Institute of

International Affairs). Addressing the rationale behind academic freedom, Barendt (2010) identified the traditional arguments for the protection of academic freedom as a sound justification for its protection; emphasising the unique role of universities ‘in carrying out research, as centres of discovery and the search for new truths and scientific methods’. At the annual conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education in 2012, Sir David Watson addressed academic freedom, which he described as the ‘fundamental academic value’. Addressing concerns that academic freedom is a concept that is under threat at the present time, in 2013, Terence Karran spoke at a research and policy seminar at the Higher Education Academy in relation to establishing a working definition of academic freedom. Concerns were aired that the rise of managerialism in United Kingdom universities, the notion of students as customers and the focus upon the economic aspects of higher education are having a negative affect upon academic freedom. Academic freedom within Europe was also the focus of the 2013 Bologna conference where Professor Peter Scott gave a keynote speech entitled: Modern Entrepreneurial Universities and the Magna Charta Universitatum: Tensions and Synergies.

### **The rise of a Christian focus in higher education**

Within the small number of religiously affiliated higher education institutions in England, there is a similar upsurge of interest in emphasising the distinct value of Christian universities within higher education and the contribution religious faith can make to the sector. There have been a series of inaugural lectures addressing these issues. In the Lord Dearing Memorial Lecture celebrating the formation of the Cathedrals Group in 2009, Archbishop Nichols argues that ‘there is a crucial role that religious faith, faith in God, can play in shaping education, not least in Higher Education, today’. Similarly, in an inaugural lecture as Professor of Education, within one of the Cathedrals Group institutions, Cooling (2011) asks ‘Is God redundant in the Classroom?’ At the inaugural ‘Dr. Rowan Williams Annual CUAC Lecture’ at the Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion Conference during 2012, Rowan Williams, Chancellor of Canterbury Christ Church University reflected on what he described as three interconnected questions: ‘What is the point of a university? What is the point of a

Christian university? What is the point of an Anglican university?’ The development of the university colleges into fully-fledged universities has provided a platform from which to advocate the unique contribution that faith-based institutions make to the diversity of higher education.

### **Debates concerning academic freedom in universities with Church foundations in England**

The relationship between a growing concern with academic freedom and the establishment of religiously affiliated universities was first aired in the press in 2007. Questions were raised about the status of academic freedom with the formation of four new universities with a Church foundation. Dennis Hayes voiced doubts about the status of academic freedom in relation to two of these universities (Church Times, 2007). The concerns were that although the Church colleges had adopted the statement on academic freedom established by Roy Jenkins’ amendment to the Education Reform Act 1988, two universities had inserted a proviso in their instrument and articles of government as follows:

In view of the fact that the university was established as a Church of England College and continues to be so, no member should at any time undermine the ethos of the College or the code of conduct based on that ethos. Subject to the above qualification the Governing Body shall ensure that Academic Staff have freedom within the law...

(Church Times, 2007)

There was subsequent coverage of this issue in the Times Higher Education magazine by Melanie Newman in an article entitled: Faith threat to free speech. The article included reported responses from spokesmen from the two universities involved, one being a statement from Canterbury Christ Church University that the ‘contextual statement about the ethos of the institution had been included in the articles to reflect the university’s origins as a teacher training college, established by the Church of England and its continuing links with the Church’ (THE, 2007).

Academic freedom and religious institutions continue to be a controversial issue in the United States and Canada and there is evidence to suggest that English Christian



institutions are aware of the controversies and have adopted some of the concerns identified by American academics. In the publication 'Mutual Expectations, The Church of England Church Colleges/Universities' the tension between academic freedom and Christian institutions is addressed as follows:

Those who would exclude religion from education or, more widely, from the public sphere, claim that there is incompatibility between Christian conviction and academic freedom. (2005, p. 5).

The incompatibility of Christian conviction with academic freedom is described in Mutual Expectations as 'one of the shibboleths of modern educational thinking' (2005, p. 6), and it is argued that Christian values are no more or less compatible with academic freedom than materialist, secularist, feminist or liberal convictions, implying that all institutions have restrictions.

This research into academic freedom is of particular interest as the Cathedrals Group now represents a coalition of recently established universities, some of which have only achieved university status during 2013, with unique characteristics in the higher education sector. The institutions within the group have a very specific relationship with their sponsoring religious bodies; with prominent members of the clergy as their Chancellors, and the majority require their Vice-Chancellors to be practising Christians as a Genuine Occupational Requirement for appointment.

### **The development of the Cathedrals Group**

The original Church of England Colleges of Higher Education have a long history, as many were established over one hundred and fifty years ago, and their original focus was to make a specifically Christian contribution to higher education in the training of teachers and preparing students for ministry in the Church. The colleges have had a struggle for survival as in 1973 there were twenty-seven Anglican colleges, but by 1985, due to government reorganization of higher education, only twelve remained (McGregor, 1989).

Many of the surviving colleges were the result of the amalgamation of faith-based and secular institutions. The colleges were subject to the vagaries of supply and demand for the training of teachers. During a time of contraction in teacher training in the 1980s, the colleges struggled to maintain a presence in higher education, and they formed a succession of councils where the then principals and now vice-chancellors of the institutions grouped together for solidarity and mutual support. The Council of Church and Associated Colleges of Higher Education, established in 1988, was changed to the Council of Church Colleges in 2000 and subsequently became the Council of Church Colleges and Universities in 2002.

The Cathedrals Group, launched in November 2009, is a development of the former Council of Church Universities and Colleges. From their origins as teacher-training colleges, founded by the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church, the fourteen English members of the group have diversified from their original role in higher education, gaining university and university college status during the last decade.

### **Thesis structure**

The structure of my thesis is as follows. Chapter One introduces the rationale and context of my thesis. Chapter Two refers to relevant literature in relation to my area of research and is in three parts. Part one investigates the historical development of academic freedom in England and the United States. This includes an account of the establishment of the early universities in Europe, the influence of the Enlightenment and the formation of the influential Association of American University Professors in the USA. I have also included significant legislation and recent developments in relation to academic freedom in the United Kingdom. Part two addresses definitions of academic freedom and considers the arguments for and against the compatibility of academic freedom with faith-based institutions. The final part includes a critical overview of relevant empirical research in the area.

In Chapter Three I state my main research question ‘How is academic freedom conceived and addressed in Church affiliated universities and university colleges in England?’ In addition, there are six subsidiary questions relating to academics’ understandings of academic freedom within the context of their institutions considering issues as to how academic freedom is ensured, how conflict might be negotiated, whether there are any restrictions, and in what ways might Church affiliated institutions enhance academic freedom? An outline of the context of the research is followed by a description and justification of the qualitative research design. I also address how I made decisions about sampling, why I chose semi-structured interviews as a way to collect data and how I approached the process of data analysis. In the final section of this chapter, I identify the range of ethical issues involved in conducting the research, including my choice of research design and the ethical implications for those making the decision to take part and the possible ramifications for the institutions within the group.

Chapter Four is concerned with a qualitative discussion of the research findings based upon the analysis of twenty-two interviews, comprising eleven interviews with senior managers and eleven interviews with academics across a range of fourteen institutions within the Cathedrals Group. I describe the tendencies and patterns that have emerged from the data and consider the resulting data in relation to my research questions.

Chapter Five contains an in-depth discussion of the findings of my research. In this chapter, I reflect upon the main question in my thesis and identify specific issues that I consider significant in relation to my thesis. Most interesting and surprising was that the data obtained in my research indicates that it was very uncommon for academics to experience restrictions on their academic freedom. Whilst literature on the subject is suggestive that academic freedom operates differently in Christian institutions and that restrictions are legitimate to protect the Christian ethos, this was not apparent in the data from my research. I subsequently offer two explanations for this and discuss the stark differences between English faith-based institutions and American Christian universities and colleges. This is followed by my conclusion in Chapter Six.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **The historical origins and development of academic freedom**

In order to contextualise how academic freedom is approached in the present day it is important to reflect upon its historical origins to gain an understanding of how the concept has developed and changed over the centuries. The variety of perspectives on the roots of academic freedom is a key element to the different understandings of what academic freedom might mean in the twenty-first century, particularly in relation to faith-based institutions. In connection with faith-based universities and university colleges, I have given more attention to American literature, and in particular, the development of the Association of American University Professors, as the contemporary contested relationship between academic freedom and Christian institutions originated in the United States and is addressed most comprehensively by American academics.

This chapter briefly traces the historical roots of academic freedom and identifies significant developments, which have affected the ways in which academic freedom is understood in the United Kingdom and USA. Many accounts of how the concept of academic freedom has developed over time refer to the first European universities founded by the Church. However, it is generally acknowledged that the contemporary concept of individual academic freedom was established and formalised in German universities in the mid-nineteen century and has shaped our present day understanding of the concept of a university and academics' rights and responsibilities.

Accounts of the development of academic freedom in the West refer to the formation of the first universities. It is generally accepted that historically the concept of academic freedom has its roots in the establishment of medieval Christian universities in Western Europe, starting with the University of Bologna in the eleventh century, Paris in France and Oxford followed by Cambridge in England. Recognition of these universities was

granted by the approval of the Pope, or in the case of Bologna, the emperor Frederick Barbarossa (Arthur, 2006; Karran, 2009; Russell, 1993; Thorens, 2006).

Papal recognition and confirmation of a university often given through issuing a Papal Bull, gave it international recognition together with a degree of independence from local princes and rulers.

(Arthur, 2006, p.111)

This development gave the early universities a degree of independence from external control and represents, in a rudimentary form, one aspect of academic freedom that is institutional autonomy. However, this early concept of academic freedom did not involve scholars' involvement in teaching and research as would be expected today, and the freedoms granted to these early universities did not apply to individual scholars. As Karran states: 'academic freedom in its modern sense was not formally recognised within such institutions' (2009, p.192). The ecclesiastical rights bestowed upon the medieval universities in fact protected the autonomy of the Church against interference from the state, and represented the starting point of self-determination for the institutions, not individual academic freedom. Although the autonomy of the Church and the universities was secured, such freedoms did not extend to individual scholars whose intellectual rights were still governed by the prevailing religious beliefs of the time. Such an example is Galileo's (1564-1642) innovation in scientific thinking and his support for Copernicus' heliocentric theory that brought him into conflict with the Church of Rome and ecclesiastical beliefs about the nature of the universe. What were regarded as radical ideas at that time lead to serious charges of heresy, and he was forced to recant. When individual freedom of thought conflicted with established theological knowledge, the right to express new ideas was not guaranteed, encouraged or countenanced by the Church. It was during the seventeenth century that the phrase *libertas philosophandi* was used by Tommaso Campanella in his defence of Galileo which 'was the first reasoned argument to be published in support of the freedom of scientific investigation' (Sutton, 1953, p. 311). Karran (2009) suggests that the freedom protected by the phrase *libertas philosophandi* was one that applied to the individual scholar rather than institutional autonomy.

## **The fading influence of the Church**

The Reformation in Europe brought about marked changes to the authority and influence of the Catholic Church, which in turn had an impact upon the universities.

Just as the medieval university arose from the church, the Reformation was born in the university and profoundly affected the shape of the university and the Christian faith.

(Adrian 2003, p. 17)

In England, the Reformation and Henry VIII's subsequent establishment of the Church of England meant that the universities lost the protection of the Pope and Arthur (2006) argues that as universities sought allegiance with the state and the state's religion, their autonomy and freedom to express and pursue ideas was compromised.

However, the most contentious challenge to the universities' spiritual and ecclesiastical function and influence came from the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century when Enlightenment thought 'Influenced the teaching methods and curricula of the universities and eroded dependence on ecclesiastical authority' (Adrian, 2003, p. 17). The subsequent development of secular universities, freed from the constraints of religious dogma, significantly offered a different view of what academic freedom might mean.

One important legacy of the Enlightenment that remains to this day is the belief in free inquiry, inquiry that is freed from the constraints of tradition and authority, particularly as found in religion. (Theissen, 2001, p. 85)

During this important period of change in intellectual thought, there was a shift from a religion-centered approach to knowledge to the scientific method of human reason, 'the rigorous, rational and replicable manner of analyzing data and establishing hypotheses' (Brown, 2006). With the rise of academics' interest in the search for ultimate truth from scientific methods, the place for religious revelation declined within the academic community and Christian truth was relegated to separate theology departments. Diekema (2000) describes this as a period in higher education and intellectual development in which there was a shift 'from God-centeredness to man-centeredness, from faith in God

to faith in reason' (p. 2). The place of a Christian perspective on knowledge within largely secular specialized subjects and secular universities was limited and theology became less prominent in the hierarchy of academic disciplines. It was during this period that the conflict developed between Christian academics' academic freedom to assert the importance of their worldview and the notion of revealed truth and secular academics' belief in what they viewed as superior scientific truth based on human reason resulting in a decline of a traditional Christian worldview within an increasingly secularized community of scholars.

Knowledge was viewed as concerned with reason and truth, whilst faith was perceived as merely as passing on primitive customs and rituals. (Arthur, 2006, p. 92)

### **The University of Berlin and the genesis of academic freedom**

The founding of the University of Berlin in 1810, and the reforms and writings of Wilhelm Von Humbolt had a profound influence on the modern conception of what a university should be, involving the combination of teaching and research (Fuchs, 1963: Fuller, 2009; Karran 2009; Thorens, 2006). This change in the nature of the university, resulting in a corresponding development of the conception of academic freedom, which involved 'the exercise of independent judgment', was a product of the modern German university during the early nineteenth century (Fuller, 2009, p.169).

The legacy of the terms *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* which developed within these Humboldtian German universities has had a notable influence on academic freedom and is central to modern day interpretations. As academic freedom became more formalized during the early nineteenth century, the relationship between teachers and students became one of reciprocal rights and duties. In terms of the professors, *Lehrfreiheit* was the term used to describe the freedom to teach and *Lernfreiheit* was the students' freedom to learn (Fuller, 2009, p. 170). *Lehrfreiheit* describes the right German academics had at that time to freedom of enquiry, including the right to determine what they taught with little administrative regulation, to conduct research and publish their findings without

interference from outside influences (Adrian, 2003; Fuller 2009; Hofstadter and Metzger, 1955; Karran, 2009; Marsden, 1994; Theissen, 2001).

The basis of American academic freedom was influenced by the ideals of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* brought back by the many American students who studied in Germany around the 1890s and adopted by leading universities (Adrian, 2003 and Marsden 1994), as was the greater focus on science and research in higher education (Berdahl, 1990). Adrian asserts that the inclusion of the principles of *Wissenschaft*, original scientific investigation, *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* in the published papers of associations such as the American Association of University Professors were used to ‘ensure religion would not intrude on the freedom of the professor’ (2003, p. 21).

### **The schism between Christian colleges and the American Association of University Professors**

In the United States, the formation of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915 resulted in conflict between Christian colleges and the Association, as whilst most of the cases preceding the formation of the AAUP were concerned with the dismissal of American professors for controversial political views, the dismissal on religious grounds was also a concern (Marsden 1993). Marsden links the Lafayette College case in 1913 where Warfield, the President of the college, brought John Mecklin, to book and secured his eventual resignation, because ‘Mecklin’s teachings were undermining traditional Protestantism’ (p. 223) directly to the formation of the AAUP. Furthermore, he identifies the Lafayette College case as an illustration of the prevailing negative attitudes towards religion of those responsible for defining the twentieth century concept of academic freedom in America, which continues to have ramifications for American religious institutions. During the early stages of establishing the AAUP, a dividing line was drawn between Christian colleges and other secular institutions representing two classes within American higher education. The conclusion of the founding committee of the AAUP was that in one class of institution there was in effect complete freedom of enquiry, whilst the Christian colleges were regarded as ‘propagandizing institutions’ in relation to religion and politics (Marsden, 1993). The



continuing debates surrounding academic freedom and Christian institutions, therefore, are linked inextricably to the formation of the AAUP.

### **The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure**

The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure forms the standard definition of academic freedom in America. Arising from the formation of the American Association of University Professors in 1915, the statement asserts that academic freedom applies to both teaching and research and as such is essential in the search for truth and the common good in society. Reflecting the concepts of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*, academic freedom was seen as fundamental to the protection of the rights of the teacher and teaching and the student and learning (AAUP, 1940, p.3).

The definition of academic freedom set out in the Statement consists of three principles. The first principle relates to individual academic's freedom of enquiry and research and the publication of results, conditional on the performance of other academic duties. Financial rewards for research were to be negotiated with the institution (AAUP, 1940, p.3).

The second principle relates to an academic's freedom with regard to their teaching within the institution. That is academics have the professional autonomy to decide on the content of their classes within their particular area of expertise (AAUP 1940, p. 3). There are however caveats in principal two of the Statement in that although the document states that teachers are entitled to freedom to discuss their subject in the classroom, 'they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject.' The differentiation between voicing opinions based upon an individual's expertise in their subject area and those that are personal and therefore an aspect of free speech are commented in the 1970 Interpretive Comments, whilst asserting that the intent of the statement 'is not to discourage what is "controversial".' Controversy is stated as 'at the heart of the free academic inquiry', but the passage 'serves to underscore the need for teachers to avoid persistently intruding material which has no relation to their subject' (p.5).

Of particular significance to religious institutions is the statement that, ‘Limitations on academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment’. Some Faith-based universities, particularly in the USA and Canada, use this argument to support their institutional limits, within the tenets of Christian belief, on their academics’ teaching and research and, latterly professional associations both in the USA and in Canada have challenged this.

Principle three extends the academic’s freedom to voice their views beyond the confines of the classroom or the institution and overlaps with the right to free speech. However, in principal three, there is a fine note of caution in the document, which relates to college and university teachers’ rights and responsibilities to their professional status and their institutions when speaking or writing in public, relating to accuracy, restraint, respect for other opinions and the obligation to make it clear that they are not speaking for their institution (AAUP, 1940).

The special case of religious institutions and the limitations clause was rescinded by the AAUP in the 1970 Interpretive Comments with the statement that: ‘Most church-related institutions no longer need or desire the departure from the principle of academic freedom implied in the 1940 Statement, and we do not now endorse such a departure’ (AAUP, 1970). The AAUP’s decision not to endorse the limitations clause was to have adverse consequences for religious institutions in terms of their status within higher education where the majority of institutions had adopted a secular definition of academic freedom. In 1988 a subcommittee of Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure suggested that the ‘necessary consequence’ of religious institutions invoking the limitations clause in the 1940 statement was that they forfeit ‘the moral right to proclaim themselves as authentic seats of higher learning’ (Academe, 1988). The implication being that should they invoke the limitations clause, the Christian institutions were inferior to their secular counterparts and their approach to academic freedom relegated them to second-class status as higher education institutions. This decision was to add to the tension between Christian institutions and the secular approach to academic freedom by

the AAUP. Diekema (2000) for example, criticizes the AAUP and its attitude towards Christian colleges and universities on the grounds that the intolerance of religion is 'quite politically correct in the membership of the organization and its leadership' (p.23).

### **Academic freedom and the state in the United Kingdom**

Institutional autonomy and tensions between the state and interference in higher education have been identified as a threat to academic freedom (Arblaster, 1974, Russell 1993). Scott (1995) in relation to the growth of mass higher education and the changing nature of funding councils, comments on the 'erosion of university's autonomy as more and more elaborate control systems were imposed by the state' (p. 16).

Government intervention and legislation within the wider development of higher education during the 1980's and 1990's subtly affected academic freedom in ways which were less direct, but nonetheless need to be considered. Although from a legal perspective there was some partial protection for academic freedom in the 1988 Educational Reform Act, other government initiatives radically altered the relationship between the universities and the state.

The increasing involvement of the state has been a common thread in the development of higher education to such a degree that Barnett (1988) suggests, 'Higher education is a pivotal institution in modern society. It is also a key part of the total apparatus of the state.' (p. 88).

In response to the international economic downturn in the 1970's and financial constraints in the 1980's and 1990's, the adoption of neo-liberalism ideology and values in terms of opening up and de-regulating public services in general to market disciplines heralded unprecedented external political pressures on universities by the government, which included the formation of a higher education market in which university activities were judged by market criteria (O'Hear, 1988, p. 16). Whitty (2002) identifies the marketization of higher education as in part 'from a predilection for freedom of choice as a good in itself' (p. 80), but also the belief that competition produces improvements in the quality of the services which would in turn 'enhance the wealth-producing potential of

the economy' (p. 80). Concurrent with the imposition of the ideology of market forces acting as a mechanism to raise standards in higher education, within what has now become to be known as a knowledge-based society there were pressures on universities from industry and commerce to produce new recruits with higher levels of education and meet the demands for a greater number of recruits who were educated to that level (Jarvis, 2001, p. 6). Higher education was therefore inextricably linked to economic growth and international competition.

This has led to the commodification of higher education where education is viewed as 'A commodity to be packaged and sold on open and international markets by institutions acting as enterprises' (DeVita and Case, 2003, p. 384) resulting in a model of higher education where the universities are viewed as providers in competition with each other to entice prospective students to purchase particular courses and degree programmes.

The economic base of this growing system has shifted towards the people who benefit from it, and students in turn are being recast as consumers of their education.

(Barnett and Coate, 2005, p. 37)

In order to increase efficiency whilst at the same time reducing funding in higher education, the ideology of 'new managerialism' which was established by the Conservative government under Thatcher (1979-1989) and subsequently developed by the Labour Party under the leadership of Blair has radically altered the nature of higher education and its relation to the state in the UK, involving changes as to how universities are funded, increased academic workload with the imperative to enroll more students with less economic resources and the pressures on academics to produce both high quality teaching and research (Deem and Brehony (2007). As a result of increasing government pressure to change the nature of higher education, it is Barnett's opinion that this has resulted in an increasingly limited space for academics in both teaching and research to determine the shape and direction of their own activities (1988, p. 93). In effect, these changes have resulted in a loss of professional autonomy. These contemporary external pressures are also factors to consider in relation to limitations on

academics' professional lives, 'corrupting both the spirit of the university and academic freedom' (O'Hear, 1988, p.16).

The commodification of higher education and the adoption of managerialist practices has prompted academics to reconceptualise threats to academic freedom in modern universities, in terms of the impact of commercialization, leading to concerns that there has been a deterioration in academic freedom.

The 1988 Education Reform Act brought academic freedom to the forefront of academics' consciousness when academic freedom and tenure was seen to be under threat. However, from a legal point of view, Palfreyman, (2007) suggests this is the only formal protection of academic freedom as under the Act higher education institutions have a duty:

To ensure that academic staff have the freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions. (HRA Act 1988 s202(2)(a))

This statement is less comprehensive and wide ranging in content than the AAUP Principles of Academic Freedom, and in fact, does not include all members of the academic community as protection under the Act was granted only to staff of universities established before 1992. Moreover, the statement in the 1988 act affords partial official protection for academic freedom, but is not a legal definition of academic freedom.

Further legislation in the United Kingdom also addressed academic freedom, but this was within the context of institutional academic freedom rather than academic freedom for individual scholars.

The Higher Education Act 2004 charges the Director of the Office for Fair Access, an appointment created by the Act, to:

Protect academic freedom including, in particular, the freedom of institutions to determine the content of particular courses

and the manner in which they are taught, supervised or assessed; and to determine the criteria for admission of students and apply those criteria in particular cases...

(Palfeyman 2007, p.24)

Enquiring whether academic freedom is an issue in British Universities, Bertwistle (2004) states: 'It should be because there is no legal protection guaranteeing academic freedom' (p. 203).

### **Protection of academic freedom within an international context**

The status of academic freedom in Europe is high and it is regarded as a 'fundamental aspect of the workings of the Universities in the European Union' (Karran, 2009, p. 163). The Magna Charter Universitatum (1988) signed by four hundred and thirty university rectors specifically identifies freedom of research and training as fundamental to university life and charges governments and universities with the task of respecting this fundamental requirement.

More recently at a general conference, UNESCO has produced a statement on academic freedom within an international context. Examining the Recommendation concerning the status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, (1997), which deals with protection for academic freedom, Karran makes a robust statement in support:

Academic freedom is necessary as knowledge is created by challenging orthodox ideas and beliefs, which means that because of the nature of their work, academics are more naturally led in to conflict with governments and other seats of authority. Academics are responsible for many important scientific discoveries (in chemistry, medicine, etc.) and without their work, knowledge would not have advanced, and many benefits which people enjoy today would not be possible. (2009, p. 191)

Karran (2009) identifies four critical elements relating to certain freedoms and rights in the UNESCO Recommendations. At the institutional level, these include the right to self-governance and institutional autonomy. The second element, individual rights and freedoms for academics, are congruent with standard definitions of academic freedom, including teaching, discussion, research, and the dissemination and publication of their

work. Additionally, the second element also includes that academics should also have freedoms, within the workplace, to express their opinions about the institutions, the freedom from institutional censorship and the freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. The final two elements concern self-governance and tenure.

### **Contemporary developments in academic freedom in England**

The launch of ‘Academics for Academic Freedom’ (AFAF) website in the UK in 2006 by Dennis Hayes introduced a singular development in academic freedom. In Fuller’s (2009) view this was, ‘in response to several independent developments that appeared to reinforce a sense of restriction on what academics could teach and research’ (p.36). Fuller (2009) identified these as the fear of offending students, who regarded themselves as customers as they were now paying tuition fees, and the fear of alienating possible clients for research by criticizing government or corporate policies (p. 36).

The AFAF statement (2006) is as follows:

- (1) that academics, both inside and outside the classroom, have unrestricted liberty to question and test received wisdom and to put forward controversial and unpopular opinions, whether or not these are deemed offensive, and
- (2) that academic institutions have no right to curb the exercise of this freedom by members of their staff, or to use it as grounds for disciplinary action or dismissal.

Hayes states that the AFAF statement ‘is an injunction to say what you think and applies to academics and to students’ (2009, p. 136). This is in line with Hayes’ views that free speech and academic freedom are a continuum, and this view has support from Brown (2006) who considers that the case can be made for the extension of academic freedom to include free speech amongst the liberal democracies of Western Europe (p. 119).

If free speech and academic freedom are accepted as a continuum, this of course entails a defense of the right of academics to voice opinions outside their areas of study. Rejecting the idea that academics should not speak and write on subjects that are beyond their areas

of academic expertise, Hayes (2009) argues that it is the transgressing of boundaries that engenders 'stimulating and creative work in universities' which 'often comes from interdisciplinary interest' (p.130). He vehemently rejects the argument taken up by many students' unions and the authorities of some universities not to invite speakers whose opinions might be offensive to others, stating that it 'does major damage to academic freedom and free speech' (p.132). Hayes (2009) reconceptualises the relationship between academic freedom and free speech, stating that 'New and interesting old ideas do not just arise in the classroom or laboratory but in the student union, in bars, in campus debates and the various common rooms' (p.137). Considering both of equal value Hayes sees these as legitimate foci for the discussion of new ideas, arguing that 'Speech leads to questions and to research which leads to further questions and further research and so on.' (p.137).

The position of academics and academic freedom in the United Kingdom is complex and becomes even more so if it is conflated with the democratic right to free speech. Free speech enjoys a statutory protection and therefore within a democracy, academic freedom of speech must within the law, enjoy that protection. 'The British citizen has certain expressional rights protected with by common law or by statute (notably the Human Rights Act 1988 (HRS) and its incorporation into English Law of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)', Palfreyman (2007, p. 23). However, this is not the same as the protection for academics to research and publish their findings without fear of repercussions from the state, funding bodies, or their own institution.

Twenty years since the 1988 Education Reform Act, in January 2009 the University and College Union has produced a statement on academic freedom, which draws on the 1997 UNESCO recommendations and reflects the critical elements identified by Karran (2009). The UCU statement includes freedom in teaching and discussion; freedom to disseminate and publish one's research findings; freedom from institutional censorship, including the right to express one's opinion publicly about the institution or the education system in which one works; and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies, including trade unions.



It would appear that some Christian universities are still the focus of concern and under attack by secular professional associations. Latterly, tensions between Christian institutions and professional associations have surfaced in Canada. In 2010, the Canadian Association of University Teachers Council approved the 'CAUT Procedures in Academic Freedom Cases Involving Allegations of Requirement of an Ideological Faith Test as a Condition of Employment'. Under this policy, CAUT will undertake to investigate any Canadian institutions that impose a requirement for any ideological commitment or statement of faith as a condition of employment. Such investigations represent a real threat to their institutional autonomy, and the member institutions of Christian Higher Education Canada, many of which are evangelical Christian colleges and universities with faith statements, have found themselves in the position of having to defend their institutional policies within a higher education sector with a predominantly secular approach to academic freedom.

The concept of the university, and alongside this the idea that such institutions should have certain freedoms is rooted in the development of higher education since the first universities were established. The influence of the University of Berlin and the Humboldtian ideas of *Leheifreit* and *Lernfreit* which underpinned the AAUP's 1940 Principles of Academic freedom can still be seen today in modern conceptions of academic freedom. Indeed, within the USA the 1940 statement remains the bedrock of secular approaches to academic freedom. It is evident that the development of the earliest universities still have relevance today and that academic freedom is still a concept that is held dear in the higher education sector and that it is something that should be protected.

In the West, the seeds of the concept of academic freedom developed from notions of institutional autonomy in the first universities in medieval Europe, through to the genesis of the modern conception of academic freedom in University of Berlin in the nineteenth century, which then migrated to the USA and formed the basis for the AAUP. The protection of academic freedom is a worldwide concern for modern universities. There is

a growing solidarity in higher education in Europe through the Magna Charta Universitatum and globally through UNESCO to define and protect academic freedom.

Within the UK the 1988 Education Reform Act brought academic freedom to the forefront of academic's consciousness when academic freedom and tenure was seen to be under threat.

Despite the reaction to the 1988 Education Reform Act when academic freedom became a concern and was identified as something that should be defended, there is still little statutory protection for academics' in the UK and many academics consider that it is under threat.

The following section focuses upon arguments for academic freedom including an overview of the arguments as to whether academic freedom is compatible with faith-based institutions.

### **Arguments for Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is a contested concept. There are a variety of definitions as to what it is and again what it is not. As higher education continues to expand and diversify, the nature and role of the university is questioned and subsequently that of academics. Is academic freedom a right that specifically applies to academics in the workplace or, as some writers argue, is free speech on a continuum of academic freedom? Further complications reside in the arguments and tensions between the concepts of institutional autonomy and individual academic freedom.

This is a particularly sensitive area for Christian institutions and academics, who are faced with charges 'That the ideal of academic freedom is violated in Christian colleges and universities, or that such schools are inferior because they can only have a limited degree of academic freedom' (Theissen, 2004, p. 42). The vexing question for both American and UK academics is whether Christian institutions are a special case and

therefore constraints on academic freedom are legitimate in order to protect their Christian mission.

In this section, I address two areas of discussion relevant to my main and subsidiary research questions. Initially, I review the arguments for academic freedom, which are the foundations of academic freedom in secular institutions. Secondly, I identify the arguments for and against the compatibility of academic freedom in institutions with a faith-base.

### **The case for academic freedom**

Academic freedom is an important right that only exists within a particular context. The concept of academic freedom is inextricably linked to those higher education institutions that are designated as universities, and can only be discussed within the context of the university, and a consideration of its unique function in society.

Menand describes the central importance of academic freedom as follows:

Academic freedom is not simply a kind of bonus enjoyed by workers in the system, a philosophical luxury universities could function just as effectively, and much more efficiently without. It is the key legitimating concept of the whole enterprise. (Menand 1996, p.4)

Searle (1972) expands this argument to assert that the rights to academic freedom are embedded within the understanding of the university as a specialized institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and truth for the benefit of society. If we are serious about knowledge and truth, and the function of universities is to generate knowledge and truth, the best way to achieve this is to allow academics the freedom to do so. Following on from the unique purpose of the university, academics have particular rights, which can be traced back to the original concept of *Lehrfreiheit* in the University of Berlin. These are specific intellectual rights, which are special to academics working in universities because of their particular expertise in their subject areas and are fundamental to the concept of academic freedom.

It is a right extended to a particular group of people for a particular purpose. It is a right of university faculty because it promotes the growth of knowledge. (Strike, 1982, p. 101)

Central to the definition of academic freedom is that individual academics have the right to be free to teach, research and publish without interference from external authority. Furthermore, academic freedom is extended to academics in the belief that their work enhances and promotes the development of worthwhile knowledge, (Tight, 1988, p. 132). Put succinctly ‘The university exists to pursue knowledge and to impart it. It is the faculty that carries out that mission.’ (MacIver, 1955, p. 94).

There are historical precedents for particular epistemologies relating to definitions of academic freedom. The concepts of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* emerged during a period of Enlightenment values, an ‘age of reason’ and empiricism. The 1940 AAUP Statement of Academic Freedom was conceived during a time when there were firm ideals of free and objective scientific enquiry, and the belief that if we care about knowledge and truth, academics need to be given as much freedom as possible to follow wherever their research might lead. Searle (1972) is unequivocal in his stance that ‘claims to knowledge can only be validated as knowledge as opposed to dogma or speculation – by being subjected to the tests of free enquiry’. However, latterly there have been challenges to Searle’s more traditional point of view. For example Rorty disagrees:

I think there are a lot of different philosophical beliefs about the nature of truth and rationality that can be invoked to defend the traditions and practices that we call academic freedom. (Rorty, 1996, p. 24)

Within the academy as a whole, there are differing philosophical arguments as to the nature of truth and knowledge and these underpin the differing viewpoints in respect of secular and Christian interpretations of academic freedom. Further arguments in relation to differing conceptions of what constitutes truth and knowledge are discussed in depth in a later section of this chapter addressing the compatibility and incompatibility of a Christian mission with academic freedom.

Searle distinguishes between the special theory of academic freedom, which derives from the theory of a university, and the general. ‘The General Theory is an extension of the concept of academic freedom, because under it the academic role preserves the rights accorded to the citizenship role, except insofar as these rights are regulated to realise the purposes of the university’ (1972, p. 177) .

Academic freedom can be seen as closely linked to free speech, which is a moral right for all members of society, and should be free from state interference. However, academic freedom ensures that academics’ rights to free speech are protected in the workplace that is the university, whereas a citizen’s rights to free speech are not. Although citizens have the general right to freedom of speech, this does not extend to their roles within the workplace as there are restrictions placed by organizations on what employees may or may not say which are linked to the purposes of the organization. For example, Dworkin (1996) suggests that the First Amendment is not violated when restrictions are applied to employees in private organizations in that dismissal for denigrating a company’s product is not an infringement of free speech. Neither, he argues, would a church allow ‘one of its priests to preach a rival faith from its pulpit’ (p. 184). Therefore, if an organization has a particular purpose or product, restrictions may be applied to employees to protect the function and position of the institution.

By contrast, universities are unique institutions whose mission is to support free enquiry and scholarship and therefore they have a completely different function in society to that of private companies. It is a prerequisite that academics’ free speech is protected, and it is not the purpose of a university to place restrictions upon free speech, indeed it is quite the reverse.

More recently, in the United Kingdom there have been developments in academic papers to expand the notion of academic freedom to include free speech, notably after the formation of Academics for Academic Freedom by Dennis Hayes in 2006. Fuller (2009), Harris (2009) and Hayes (2009), argue strongly for an extension of academic freedom to include free speech, arguing that free speech and academic freedom are part of a

continuum. Hayes argues that distinguishing between academic freedom and free speech represents an anti-intellectual narrowing of academic life. Dworkin (2006) takes a more sanguine view. Whilst acknowledging that academic freedom has a relationship with free speech and is supported by the Constitution's First Amendment, and 'It might therefore seem natural to treat academic freedom as just the application of that more general right to the special case of academic institutions' he concurs that this would 'obscure much that is special about academic freedom' (p. 184). Defining free speech as a moral as well as a legal right for everyone, he would disagree with Hayes' position, advocating a special position for academic freedom in relation to scholars, arguing that academic freedom requires institutions to support their views regardless of what they say or write and that this is a stronger right than that of free speech. Free speech is the right not to be prevented from voicing ideas and opinions, but this does not include the right to be supported by those who find these either false or unwanted. Haskell (2006) voices similar views to those of Dworkin, stating that it makes sense legally to think of academic freedom as a subset of First Amendment liberties. However, he points out that whilst free speech and academic freedom may overlap and reinforce each other at certain points, 'Historically speaking the heart and soul of academic freedom lie not in free speech but in professional autonomy and collegiate self-governance.' (p. 54)

### **Christian universities and academic freedom: arguments for and against compatibility**

Christian academics strongly support the significance of academic freedom. The tensions focus upon the desirability of adopting secular concepts of academic freedom and truth that threaten their unique Christian identity and mission within the higher education sector.

Academics concerned with the preservation of Christian higher education institutions emphasise the threat of encroaching secularisation and the need to protect the existence of their colleges and universities amongst the much larger population of secular universities. They also contend the accusation that institutions with a religious mission place unwarranted limits on academic freedom, (Marsden, 1993, 1994, 1997; Burtchaell,

1998; Diekema 2000; Benne, 2001; Theissen 2001, 2004; Arthur 2006). Referring to academic freedom, in the context of English faith-based universities, Sullivan (2007) is of the view that institutions should have the freedom to protect a distinctive faith-based ethos.

Institutions and communities have a right to preserve the ethos upon which their distinctive nature and the purposes for which they exist from erosion by activities and expressions that undermine them (p. 1)

There are four strands to the arguments for the compatibility of Christian universities and academic freedom. Firstly, that the definition of what academic freedom is unclear and confused. Secondly, pure academic freedom is an unrealistic goal. Thirdly, developments in epistemology including postmodernism allow space for a specific Christian worldview to be included in the academy. Fourthly, there is an emphasis on institutional freedom as opposed to individual academic freedom.

### **Definitions of academic freedom are confused**

Christian academics question the concept of academic freedom in the contemporary academy on the grounds that a definition is problematic, contested and there is no clear agreement as to what it is. For example, Diekema (2000) suggests from his review of what he describes as ‘the tortuous literature’ there is ‘no dominant or common view of academic freedom’ (2000, p. 6). Theissen argues in a similar vein and defends the criticism that academic freedom is violated in Christian colleges and universities stating, ‘This charge rests on a muddled, unrealistic, and philosophically indefensible concept of academic freedom’ (2004 p. 42). More recently, Ream (2007) foregrounds his discussion on academic freedom with the contention that the specific nature of academic freedom is difficult to define. The justification for a Christian university’s articulation of academic freedom rests on the supposition that as the existing definitions are complex and there is no general academic agreement to its precise nature, academic freedom a Christian perspective on academic freedom is as legitimate as is any other.

There are three key features common to the definitions of those proposing the defence of academic freedom. One is that academic freedom is essential to the concept of what constitutes a university; it is as Streb argues, ‘the cornerstone of the university’s mission to educate students and expand the boundaries of knowledge’ (2006, p. 7). The second is that it involves the intellectual freedom of academics to promote inquiry and learning supporting the freedom to test received ideas and voice unpopular opinions.

Thus the fundamental requirement of academic freedom is the protection of the privileges and security of those who hold unpopular views from those inside or outside the university who hold power. (Strike 1982 p.76)

The third is that it is central to the growth of knowledge and truth:

If the dimensions of academic freedom derive from the demands of the pursuit of truth, so too threats to academic freedom can be understood as derailments of that quest. (Hawksworth 1988 p.17)

However, there is quite rightly, justification for the argument that definitions are confused, as it is widely acknowledged that definitions of academic freedom are complicated. For example, Menand acknowledges the difficulty in defining academic freedom and, reflecting upon the changing nature of higher education, states that:

A more deeply misleading assumption informing the debate over the future of the university is the notion that there exists some unproblematic conception of academic freedom that is philosophically coherent and that will conduce to outcomes in particular cases which all parties will feel to be just and equitable. (Menand, 1996, p. 5)

Furthermore, he later contends that, ‘The concept of academic freedom, in short, has always been problematic. It is inherently problematic’ (Menand, 1996, p. 6).



Writing from the perspective of a Christian academic, whilst suggesting that definitions are problematic, nonetheless Diekema's definition of academic freedom contains the essential elements of secular concepts of academic freedom:

Academic freedom is a specific kind of freedom, peculiar to a defined task and peculiarly valuable to the carrying out of that task. It is an idea, a principle, that is real in the academy; it takes on a life of its own only in the confines of the scholarly community. (Diekema, 2000, p. 9)

In his discussion of faith-informed scholarship and academic freedom, Ream refers to Marsden's contention that 'Scholars should be as free as possible within the framework of their other higher commitments to explore and communicate even unpopular and unconventional ideas' (Marsden, 1993, p. 232).

Christian academics are not arguing against the concept of academic freedom per se, but are making claims for a rather different understanding of the concept of academic freedom within the context of an institution with a Christian mission.

### **Pure academic freedom is an illusion**

Christian academics suggest that complete academic freedom is an impossible goal and all institutions, whether secular or Christian are subject to their own particular constraints and limitations. The pure form of academic freedom is an illusion as all institutions have limitations; it is just that Christian institutions have another concept.

The notion of absolute freedom is a myth. Freedom, whether individual, social, political, is necessarily limited. Freedom is always freedom in context. Freedom is only possible in the context of what restricts freedom. Hence notions of "full freedom" in research and teaching are by their very nature problematic. (Theissen, 2001, p. 85)

In support of any restrictions that might be placed on academic freedom in Christian institutions by way of faith requirements, the argument is put forward that all institutions restrict academic freedom in a variety of ways and therefore restrictions are an inevitable part of the present day university. Essentially, Christian academics argue that since, in

their view, all secular institutions place limits on academic freedom, it is entirely appropriate and legitimate for a religiously affiliated university to limit academic freedom based on a particular religious worldview. Arthur argues this view concisely as follows:

There is often little difference between a private university, which may be controlled by a particular group with its own worldview, which then imposes its own particular restrictions on academic freedom, and a government-controlled university which ostensibly claims to guarantee a level or degree of academic freedom in the constitution of the state.

(Arthur, 2006, p. 113)

Of course, this is a very pertinent point to make about university life. English universities are constrained nationally by various governmental agencies that influence their funding and consequently research, for example the Higher Education Funding Council for England, The Research Excellence Framework, and The Department for Business Innovation and Skills. All research requires funding, and there are therefore limitations as to which areas of research are financially viable and which are not. The content of teaching, and in particular the very controlled curricula on professional degrees, is constrained by the various bodies that oversee and determine the standards to be achieved for accreditation, such as OFSTED in university education departments. However, these limitations apply equally to all universities and are in fact additional to any faith related issues. It is not an either or argument.

The requirement of 'political correctness' within liberal cultures in American and British cultures is also identified as a constraining factor to free discussion of Christian as well as secular ideas, limiting academic freedom and influencing what academics are allowed to say or write (Diekema, 2000; Arthur, 2006). Diekema (2000) describes the dominant view or political position of political correctness within secular universities as making it difficult for other contrary views to be heard without negative implications or personal discomfort for individuals within the academic community. He particularly identifies issues such as multiculturalism, feminism and diversity as the most likely areas of contention on campus. In defence of Christian scholars on secular campuses, Diekema

also claims that the prevalence of anti-religious bias in the academy generally ensures that it is politically correct to exclude religious views from scholarly and teaching activities. Within the climate of political correctness in American universities, the Christian perspective is marginalised and Christian academics in secular institutions feel the need to keep their Christian views to themselves lest they cause offence (2000, p. 16)

Restrictions need to be kept to the minimum for the healthy growth of the university and the argument that all institutions have limitations does not support the conclusion that the addition of religious limitations as well is not problematic or harmful to the intellectual freedom to the academics in Christian institutions.

Restrictions on academic freedom are not, however, problematic for all academics and there are Christian academics who voluntarily accept limitations in order to feel free to integrate their faith and scholarship. 'Some would argue that you need to give up a certain amount of freedom in order to belong to a nurturing, bonded community.....that emphatically declares itself to have religious goals' (Arthur, 2006, p. 115). Some sectarian universities in the USA place restrictions on academic freedom because of doctrinal issues. As there are academics who willingly subscribe to these, either by way of faith statements, which are a requirement by some universities in the USA (Wagner, 2006) or personal belief, claims might be made that there is no infringement of academic freedom because the higher authority of the sponsoring church is accepted by those who work in the institution. However, it could also be argued that the fact that limits are set, which may be voluntarily accepted, does not negate that these are nonetheless limits to the search for knowledge and truth as this places academics' research and scholarship within the narrow parameters of the beliefs of a particular creed or theological orthodoxy. Christian universities that require statements of faith in the USA often require their faculty members to profess a literal belief in the Bible, and some academics believe that requirements such as these cannot be reconciled with secular definitions of academic freedom.

### **Differing worldviews**

Academics supporting Christian scholarship argue for their particular conception of academic freedom on the grounds of a conflict of epistemologies with regard to truth and knowledge. They question the Enlightenment paradigm and the concept of empirical scientific knowledge, upon which the generally accepted definition of academic freedom was historically conceived. Criticizing empiricism and the concept of objectivity, Christian academics argue that particular subjective sets of beliefs or worldviews influence interpretations of all reality, shaping and limiting thought as to what counts as knowledge and research, suggesting that there is no neutrality in academic work, differentiating between a secular and a Christian worldview (Arthur, 2006; Edlin, 2009 Theissen 2001).

The prevailing idea of academic freedom rests on an epistemology which is now generally recognized to be fundamentally flawed. It is surprising that the 1940 formulation of academic freedom by the AAUP, and others similar to it, still persist. They are in desperate need of an updating. The distrust of any limitations on academic freedom fails to recognize that a researcher or teacher inherits a standpoint, a point of view, from which he or she pursues or expounds the truth. (Theissen 2001, p. 86)

The epistemological position of Christian academics is to reject the scientific concept of knowledge and truth, as this cannot be sustained in relation to faith and belief in revealed truth, and they have veered towards postmodern epistemology with the assertion that there is not one truth but many, as a way of justifying a Christian worldview. Whilst not entirely embracing postmodernism, Theissen sees some positive arguments in the way postmodernism attempts to recapture the 'Pre-Enlightenment respect for tradition and that which is bound to a particular time and place. At the heart of postmodernism is an emphasis on particularity and 'celebration of diversity'' (2001, p. 209). Edlin (2009) also explores this avenue of thought asserting that in postmodernist terms there is no such thing as neutrality and that postmodernism is the new orthodoxy and therefore this is a platform for demanding the recognition of scholarship based on Christian worldviews.

The arguments for academic freedom and concepts of truth and knowledge based upon a Christian worldview are problematic in terms of Searle's (1972) special theory of academic freedom. Inquiry is supposed to be scientific, and conducted without preconceived ideas. In the true sense of academic freedom, no idea is beyond challenge. However, from a Christian perspective, there is a final and ultimate truth, determined by religious belief rather than scientific reason. This is clearly stated by Ream (2007) 'an understanding of academic freedom which emanates from a Christian view of humanity focuses more upon the generation and dissemination of truth yielded in the light of God's grace' (p. 5).

This conception of academic freedom is viewed by critics of Christian institutions as inherently problematic, as a university cannot have a Christian institutional point of view linked to a particular worldview and ensure that individual academics have the freedom of enquiry that is their right in secular institutions. MacIver (1955) puts this succinctly, attacking the notion of a university, which is 'a centre for the propagation of any creed' (p. 138), which he regards is at variance with the central mission of a university to engage in the free pursuit of knowledge wherever it may lead. It is argued that academic freedom is therefore inconsistent with the viewpoint of any one faith, or a particular worldview. In relation to academic freedom relating to theology, Andreescu (2008) is of the opinion that 'secular academic freedom cannot work in a religiously-affiliated college, and especially not in a theology department, because it remains alien to the religious conception of truth' (p. 186).

Christian universities have a double mission. One is the function of all universities, to pursue truth, the other is to maintain the Christian mission, and it is here that the potential for restrictions on academic freedom resides. Universities with a Christian mission are not only subservient to the institution's mission, but also to the religious body responsible for overseeing the mission. Neuhaus (1996) avoids the duality argument and attacks the whole concept of the university as a universal ideal, which has a generally accepted definition. He argues that there is no such a thing as 'a university' and that it is misleading to suggest that Christian universities have a dual identity, stating that they

have a clear identity, that is a Christian one. He rejects the concept of neutrality in secular universities as being unwarranted, arguing that ‘a secular university is not a university pure and simple’ (1996 p. 1) and that a secular university is not neutral.

### **Institutional academic freedom**

Theissen identifies extreme individualism as a ‘fundamental problem with contemporary definitions of academic freedom’ (2001, p.87), and Christian institutions favour the concept of institutional rather than individual academic freedom. In his analysis, Arthur (2006) differentiates between individual and institutional academic freedom. He then qualifies this stating that although academic freedom is often associated with institutional autonomy this does not guarantee academic freedom. Diekema proposes that all colleges and universities distinguish between individual and institutional academic freedom, and in support of this ideal he suggests the following definition is adopted:

Institutional academic freedom is the foundational principle granted only to academic institutions (colleges and universities) and designed to protect their corporate autonomy; that is, their freedom from interference by external forces in the affairs of the institution. It is the principle that protects colleges and universities, as corporate entities, from undue influence and meddling by political authorities, special interests, pressure groups or any other entity that wields power in society. (Diekema 2000 p.86)

It is an understandable position that Christian institutions hold firmly to the concept of institutional academic freedom, because autonomy is the means by which the Christian foundation is protected against the erosion of its distinctive Christian mission.

Defending Christian higher education, it is McConnell’s opinion that: ‘The controversy with regard to religious colleges and universities presents the conflict between individual and institutional academic freedom at its most extreme’ (1993, p. 306). In his view, the institutional academic freedom of religious institutions should be protected from the requirements of academic freedom in secular institutions. Firstly, because of their intellectual contribution to their faculty, students and the nation, and that an unmodified

form of academic freedom would lead to the extinction of the institutions. Secondly, a single model of truth seeking would be inconsistent with the principles upon which academic freedom is based. Thirdly, the extension of secular academic freedom to religious institutions on intellectual grounds would undermine religious freedom by curtailing the ability of religious communities to maintain and transmit their beliefs. (1990, p. 312). McConnell's arguments are robustly criticized by Thompson and Finkin (1993). Acknowledging that Christian institutions may make a contribution towards intellectual life they doubt whether making these contributions necessitates limiting the academic freedom of their members. Whilst the existence of Christian universities might contribute towards the common good of society, they doubt whether the continued existence of the institutions ensured by coercive restrictions on freedom is any contribution towards the common good.

In universities where there is a strong faith mission there is the potential for conflict between the academic freedom of individuals working in the university and the institutions' academic freedom to ensure the mission is nurtured and sustained. Arguing that institutional neutrality is a requirement for academic freedom Strike proposes that if individual academics are to have the freedom of enquiry, if the university has an official point of view 'the capacity of the members of that institution to assess that opinion critically is at best inhibited and at worst prohibited' (p.76). Furthermore, he states that a university that is affiliated to a religion or a political doctrine 'in any way that binds the views of its members cannot be fully a place where truth is sought' (p. 76). Similarly, Nelson (2010) includes religious intolerance as a threat to academic freedom indicating that colleges and universities with a very firm sense of their doctrinal position 'do not honour an acceptable standard of free enquiry' (p. 58). Echoing the stance taken by the AAUP 1988, he suggests that some such institutions are colleges and universities in name only.

If academics are to have the freedom to challenge and extend knowledge within their areas of expertise, this is a personal, individual freedom within their institutions and is a different concept to that of claims to institutional academic freedom by McConnell

(1990) and later by Arthur (2006). Warnock (1992) differentiates between the concept of academic freedom and that of autonomy. Autonomy is the term that may be applied to institutions indicating that they are self-governing in terms of academic matters but academic freedom refers to individuals within the institutions. Thorens offers a succinct clarification of the difference between institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the following statement:

Hence, autonomy can be understood and accepted only as the degree of useful – indispensable – autonomy for the university to fulfill its mission. In short, we can grossly define autonomy as the indispensable freedom that allows the institution to organize itself in order to best fulfill its tasks. Academic freedom stands as the necessary freedom that allows members of the institution to best fulfill their individual tasks qua members of the institution. (2006, p. 10)

A university may therefore be autonomous in defining its mission, but academic freedom can only apply to those individuals who learn, teach and research within the institution. A university cannot claim to have academic freedom per se, but only to protect or limit the academic freedom of its employees and students. It is not a being and therefore it cannot hold academic freedom within itself.

There is evidently sensitivity to the notion of academic freedom within Christian Colleges and Universities and many authors supporting their existence include a refutation of the ‘charge that the ideal of academic freedom is violated’ (Theissen 2004, p.42). Institutional academic freedom is favoured by Arthur (2006) who advances the idea that if one belongs to a ‘community, such as a university that emphatically declares itself to have religious goals’ (p.115) this appears to involve relinquishing a degree of freedom. Paradoxically, whilst asserting that ‘even liberals recognize that academic freedom is not an unlimited freedom’, Arthur is critical of the perception that Christian institutions limit academic freedom on the basis of religious belief which he considers are ‘illegitimate or unjustified’ (p.113). He makes the point that when limits are imposed on academic freedom, liberals make reference to the ‘limits of’ academic freedom whilst should faith based institutions do the same reference is made to ‘limits on’.



## **The Range of Empirical Research: Faith-Based Institutions and Beyond**

Scholarly writing about academic freedom in faith-based institutions addresses the threats of secularisation, and discussion of the wider secular meanings of academic freedom and their relationship to faith-based institutions. There has been very little empirical research to ascertain the views of academics in relation to the perceptions and experiences of academic freedom within faith-based universities and colleges. Similarly, within the wider academic community, Akerlind and Kayrooz comment on the paucity of empirical research into what different researchers mean by academic freedom (2003, p. 330). At the present time, there is very little written about the faith-based institutions in England and very limited empirical research. Glanzer (2008) carried out an empirical study of Christian higher education in England, however this research did not include any consideration of academic freedom.

The following review of empirical research considers six journal articles from a variety of international sources, including the United States of America, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. Five of the articles focus upon academic freedom in higher education, and represent the diversity of approaches to academic freedom within a variety of educational contexts. Two articles address academics' perceptions of academic freedom from within the context of orthodox private Christian Universities. The first is a small case study of a private American Christian university, and the second is a survey of a group of private Christian universities in Canada. These two empirical studies exemplify the arguments for the compatibility of academic freedom in faith-based institutions. The third paper researches the differences in the USA between private for-profit universities' and public universities' attitudes and responses towards controversies in relation to academic freedom and tenure and suggests that where academic freedom is protected controversial issues can be publicly debated, but the absence of academic freedom limits such debates. The fourth paper is a large-scale comprehensive empirical survey of social scientists' views of academic freedom in Australia, which seeks to investigate the range of meanings of academic freedom within a particular discipline. The fifth paper I have included addresses research into Christian identity within a number of faith-based institutions in the United Kingdom.

## **Faculty perceptions of academic freedom at a private religious university**

This quite contemporary research by Swezey and Ross (2011) investigates faculty perceptions of academic freedom within the context of Regent University in the USA. The authors of the paper describe their institution as follows:

Regent University most often describes itself using the term “Christian” in promotional materials. Occasionally, it will use the term “evangelical” to describe its approach to the Christian faith from a more narrow perspective.

(Swezey and Ross, 2011 p. 6)

The study is situated within a private religious institution with strict recruitment criteria, requiring staff to profess to be Christians and to sign a statement of faith. Both authors were professors employed by the university. Their methodology was a case study involving eighteen semi-structured interviews with senior faculty members and administrators from a wide range of faith traditions.

The study finds little evidence of any infringements on academic freedom in the interviewees’ perceptions of academic freedom in their institution. Regent University has a clear statement on academic freedom that is closely linked to a Christian worldview, which is identified as compatible with academic freedom.

We regard academic freedom as a sacred trust and God-given responsibility that encourages the scholarly pursuit of truth in each academic discipline to which God has called us. The foundation of academic freedom is the belief that God is the author of all truth. All faculty are encouraged to seek wisdom and understanding, acquire knowledge and teach others. Therefore, faculty need to not fear the Lord.

(Regent University, 2010a)

It is therefore very clear that any academic seeking employment at the university would be fully aware of the faith requirements, and they are willing ‘to give up a certain amount of freedom in order to belong to a nurturing, bonded community’ (Arthur, 2006, p. 115).

In their literature review, the long standing tension between the American Association of University Professors’ and American Christian institutions is put in a rather positive light,

as the authors quote item two of the 1940 statement as clearly recognizing the liberty of religious universities to establish qualifications on academic freedom, Swezey and Ross (2011 p.3). Furthermore, they assert that ‘public institutions operate within their own metaphysical worldview and constrain academic freedom when faculty deviate from the cultural norms of the institution, whether conservative or liberal’ (p.3) thus reflecting the prevailing arguments by academics who argue for the compatibility of academic freedom with Christian institutions.

The data analysis of the interviews identified three major themes relating to perceptions of academic freedom within the institution. First, ‘that true academic freedom only exists when a person is aligned with the teaching of Scripture’ (p. 6), which reflects the institutions’ statement on academic freedom, and the employment requirements of Regent University. Participants’ definitions of academic freedom were also in line with the institutions’ definition of academic freedom. The authors describe a range of individual responses in relation to definitions of academic freedom. One response was that as the bible is the truth of God, academic freedom is rooted in the biblical text, another the assertion that academic freedom does not give academics the right to talk about anything and that academic freedom was defined by political correctness. In response to the question as to how academic freedom differs between private religious and public universities generally, academics asserted that they had more academic freedom within the institution than other universities with the caveat that what they taught should come from the context of being a Christian. There were some suggestions that the academics at Regent enjoyed a greater freedom to discuss Christian issues within their disciplines than in secular institutions and one participant is recorded as stating that he found expressing his faith within his discipline difficult in secular universities, where ‘openly expressing their faith was viewed with cynicism or even hostility’ (p. 7). Many of the academics in this research, therefore, felt that in terms of their Christian scholarship they had more opportunities and a greater freedom to discuss issues of faith that might not be open to them in a secular institution.

The second category was that ‘all institutions operate within a gravitational tension between complete academic freedom on one end of the spectrum and limitations, whether they are religious or political in nature on the other’. This is an argument that has occurred many times by academics in defence of the compatibility of limits to academic freedom in faith-based institutions. Most interesting in this research, however, was that in fact some academics felt there were aspects of their work that were problematic. This was apparent in the third theme, linked to the view of the student as customer or consumer of education and the possibility of their making trouble for professors who strayed too far from ‘perceived or real institutional orthodoxy’. There was evidence in the article that some respondents felt that their academic freedom was constrained by student opinion as demonstrated by the following quotation from the research data:

I think we all feel somewhat restricted. I have taken heat over the years with students who have ended up in the dean’s office. I teach principles of Bible study and dare to raise questions, literary criticisms. It has made us a bit more skittish about it. I, for instance, have been writing and thinking a lot in terms of open theism and I have to tone down what I want to say. Some students complain to the dean if they felt that faculty said certain things in the classroom. (Swezey and Ross, 2011, p. 9)

This is an on-going concern that has been identified as a threat to academic freedom across the academic community nationally and internationally.

Furthermore, there was an indication in Swezey and Ross’ discussion and conclusions that there was a tension between the supportive statements made by the participants during interview and on the other hand the expression of genuine concerns about voicing opinions that might have adverse repercussions from the institution. The authors state that ‘despite their generally positive perceptions of academic freedom, some participants expressed a strong undercurrent of fear of reprisal for their comments’, and that ‘the most common theme was that of self-restraint and self-censorship stemming from personal religious proclivities’ (2011, p. 9). An undercurrent of anxiety about the consequences of taking part in the research was evident as the authors reported that a few participants had concerns about confidentiality in relation to some of the questions and that ‘their

comments could cost them their jobs’ (p. 9). The most telling statement indicating that there could be issues of validity with this research was ‘One person emphatically stated that the guarantee of confidentiality would dictate what types of responses were provided during the interview’ (p. 9).

This research reflects a conception of academic freedom within a very specific Christian context and, the authors’ findings are very much in line with the arguments in academic literature that support justified limits on academic freedom within faith-based institutions. Members of faculty that took part in the research were in senior positions, had signed faith statements, and were therefore very likely to have a positive perspective on the way that academic freedom was approached in the institution. That any academic’s unease with the institutional approach to academic freedom within the faculty could be regarded as problematic is clear from Swezey and Ross’ (2011, p. 8) inclusion of the statement that some academics were of the opinion that ‘personal integrity should dictate that those who couldn’t abide by these limitations should resign their position’.

Although overall, the research appears to produce findings that are supportive of the institution’s stance on academic freedom, there is evidence of tension between some of the participants’ responses to the interview questions and their concerns about the ramifications of what they had disclosed.

### **Academic freedom in public and Christian Canadian universities**

Hiebert’s (2010) Canadian research responds to the charge by the Canadian Association of University Teachers that Christian higher education institutions violate academics’ rights to academic freedom. The initial audience for this research was the Annual General Meeting of Christian Higher Education Canada, Inc. with thirty-seven delegates from across Canada representing nineteen evangelical Christian institutions.

Following visits and delegations from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) to three CHEC institutions, this research was conceived in response to the challenges of the Canadian Association of University Teachers that institutional

confessional statements of faith violate their policy on academic freedom, which CAUT regard as essential to the concept of a university. The CAUT criticism of Canadian Christian universities was essentially similar to that of the stance of the AAUP and Christian universities in the USA. Although no institutions in the USA have been investigated because they have a statement of faith, it is clear that the AAUP's stance is that 'religious orthodoxy does not go well with the quest for knowledge' (Wagner, 2006). The research article is a summary of the participant's perceptions of serving on faculties in both public and Christian institutions. The central purpose of the research was to inquire 'as to whether or not it is possible in principle for a bona fide university in Canada today to have an academic freedom policy that respects its community's faith-based standards' (Hiebert, 2010, p. 423). The research methodology was in the form of a ten-item open-ended survey of faculty members who had experience of both public and Christian institutions. There were no details of the content of the survey items. The sample included twenty responses from nine CHEC institutions via a variety of data collection methods including Survey-Monkey.com, personal e-mails, and published articles on the subject.

The findings indicated that most respondents in both public and Christian universities experienced some limitations to academic freedom, but there was an overwhelming positive endorsement of the compatibility of statements of faith and academic freedom.

The findings also included individual edited comments from the twenty respondents. Many of the reported responses were supportive of the stance taken by their institutions in promoting Christian scholarship and identified hostility within secular institutions to the inclusion of Christian worldviews in their teaching, as opposed to the support and encouragement they received within the Christian institutions where they were currently employed. In view of the context of this research, and that it was presented as a response to perceived criticism by the CAUT, on a very public platform at the Annual General Meeting of CHEC, the positive outcomes in the findings are not surprising.

In these two examples of research into academic freedom in Evangelical institutions, (Swezey and Ross, 2011 and Hiebert, 2010), the institutions and the Christian mission

has dominance in terms of institutional freedom, and individual academic freedom is subservient to the institution. However, the members of the institutions accept limitations to their academic freedom quite freely and are also of the opinion that the faith-base of their institutions allows them more freedom to integrate their faith into their teaching and research than would be the case in a secular university. In their discussions, the authors are ready to recognize that an individual's academic freedom may be restricted in secular institutions but slow to recognize that faith restrictions could also affect individual academic freedom. The two research papers support the arguments for the compatibility of academic freedom in institutions with a Christian mission, but as the contexts for the research are within a variety of institutions with communities of committed Christians who have elected to work there, the research does not really reveal very much. The findings also indicate that the individuals involved in the studies did not see any contradiction in their willing acceptance of limitations, or that their individual freedom to teach and research might be compromised in any way.

### **Private and public responses to controversy**

Academic freedom and tenure within the context of public and private universities was also the focus of research by Tierney and Lechuga (2010). In particular, the authors examined how private for-profit and public non-profit universities situate themselves when confronted with controversy.

For-profit colleges and universities at present do not appear to have manifested themselves as a major part of higher education in the UK, but they do exist. Tierney and Lechuga (2010) define private for-profit colleges and universities, as they presently exist in the USA, as 'nationally or regionally postsecondary institutions that offer academic degrees at the associate level or above.' (p. 118). Of particular interest to Tierney and Lechuga was the way that these new organizations differ in their attitudes towards academic freedom. They reported that leaders of the for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs) argue that academic freedom is not applicable to their institutions as their focus is on the provision of practical skills and knowledge applicable to the workplace, and research activities are not a function of FPCUs. Tierney and Lechuga are

concerned that the development of these new types of higher education represents a quite different culture and organization from that of a traditional American university.

Of consequence, FPCUs do not hire faculty on the tenure track. If research is of little importance, then academic freedom is irrelevant and tenure is not necessary.

(Tierney and Lechuga, 2010, p. 118)

Tierney and Lechuga's article examines how these two types of institutions, public universities and FPCUs, place themselves in public when faced with controversies and the effects this has for democracy; arguing that, 'academic freedom not only serves as a central tenet of the academy but is also a means by which to achieve a more democratic society' (2010 p. 118). Specifically they explore whether and to what extent the concept of 'extramural utterances' that is free speech beyond the confines of the university, as an extension of academic freedom should be extended to members of faculty with particular reference to those employed in FPCUs.

Tierney and Lechuga derived the data for their article from a larger study in which they sought to understand the faculty cultures at four private for-profit colleges and universities in the USA. From extensive interviews with fifty-two respondents who were employed in FPCUs regarding their roles and responsibilities both within and outside the classroom, the findings showed that academic freedom was understood in two ways. First, it was understood 'as existing specifically within the context of their classroom activities' and secondly, 'as nonexistent and unnecessary to the mission and goals of FPCUs' (Lechuga 2008). In relation to incidents that the authors considered having implications for academic freedom, this data was subsequently supplemented by data from two other institutions that had been involved in controversial issues, the public University of Colorado at Boulder and for-profit institutions owned by Careers Education Corporation

The first controversy involved allegations of fraud at a number of for-profit institutions that were owned and operated by the Careers Education Corporation (2010, p. 23) which



were the subject of a sixty minute television programme. The second was the controversial case of Ward Churchill at Colorado University – Boulder who published work portraying the USA in a derogative manner as an aggressive nation, in which he suggested that the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre were justified. Such an inflammatory position, of course, attracted intense media coverage, centering upon the university's campus, the state, and the country as a whole.

Tierney and Lechuga (2010) interpreted that the difficulties they encountered in their attempts to gain data from employees at the CEC institutions, in effect represented the blurring of academics' rights to free speech within a university and those of employees at a business corporation. With the intention of collecting interview data from members of the CEC institutions Tierney and Lechuga encountered numerous barriers, primarily because it was impossible to contact faculty members directly, as there were no staff details on the institutions' websites. After repeated phone calls, they received contact from only two of the eight institutions and those institutions refused to give any contact details of faculty even though there were assurances of anonymity (2010, p. 124). Tierney and Lechuga exemplified the difficulty in achieving any contact with the institutions by the fact that although only two academic administrators initially agreed to an interview, ultimately one declined despite repeated phone calls. The only administrator finally taking part in the interviews, contacted the researchers on his mobile phone and disclosed that CEC monitored the emails and phone calls of staff. During a brief interview, he described the institution as a 'very autocratic organization' that lacked academic freedom. The reason the administrator gave for speaking to the researchers was:

I'm interviewing and I'll probably be out in a couple of months. I'll be glad when I'm out of here. I've had enough.  
(Tierney and Lechuga, 2010 p. 125)

There was a significant lack of response to the researchers' attempts to contact members of staff at the CEC institutions, and it would appear that they felt unable to comment on the controversy for fear of reprisals.

In contrast, there was a substantially different response to similar requests for interviews with the faculty at Colorado University to the Ward Churchill controversy which is described by Streb (2006) as ‘likely the most documented case of a threat to academic freedom after September 11’ (p. 11) and is acknowledged by Tierney and Lechuga as an exceptional case. In order to clarify the context for this research, I have included brief details about how the controversy arose. The Churchill controversy was an extreme test of academic freedom and tenure, which spread from the Colorado campus across the state and nationwide. At the heart of the controversy was Churchill’s inflammatory attack on American foreign policy, particularly in relation to the terrorist strike on the World Trade Centre on 9/11 and his article stating:

If there was a better, more effective, or in fact any other way of visiting some penalty befitting their participation upon the little Eichmanns inhabiting the sterile sanctuary of the twin towers, I’d really be interested in hearing about it.

(Churchill 2001)

Despite the furor surrounding Churchill’s opinions he was nonetheless supported by the Faculty Senate in the following very strong statement on academic freedom:

If we stand for the dissemination of knowledge, of the freedom to question, and of freedom of expression, then we must protect all, including Professor Churchill and others, expressing the most unpopular sentiments. Anything less than an affirmation of academic freedom for all the University’s faculty is an admission that we are not truly committed to the University’s mission and philosophy.

(Dodge 2005)

Against this background, the researchers contacted twenty faculty members, eliciting their opinions on the controversy, however as opposed to the members of CEC institutions, the professors at Colorado felt able to respond freely and Tierney and Lechuga were able to conduct twenty interviews. Tierney and Lechuga concluded that those interviewed ‘did not feel the need to request approval and did not fear sanctions from the university for speaking out’, although they were generally uncomfortable with

what he had said, most supported his right to free speech and make his statements and ‘conveyed the sentiment that academic freedom was under attack’ (2010, p.127).

Further interview evidence from other members of the faculty supported the notion of freedom of speech and extramural utterances by professors, and that the university and the constitution should protect them from political attacks. Other views were that the backlash from the controversy ‘had resulted in more than just a decline of academic freedom. The incident and the events that followed created a climate that was more akin to censorship, resulting in the decline of intellectualism’ (Tierney and Lechuga p. 127).

Tierney and Lechunga suggest that the role of the university as a place of public debate is at a crossroads. As in the case of the CEC controversy, there is the option to avoid controversy by any means possible as would happen with a public company. The other option is to regard the university as a place where public debate is central to its role for the common good of a democratic society.

### **Understanding academic freedom: the views of social scientists**

There have been two large-scale linked studies in Australia (Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston 2001, and Akerlind and Kayrooz, 2003). These two research projects indicate the ever-widening scope of perceived threats to academic freedom. Commissioned by the Australia Institute, the first exploratory study focused upon social scientists’ perceptions and experiences within the financial environment of commercialization, involving reliance on external funding, students’ fees and consulting services, which in turn means that universities are concerned with markets and customers. In the view of Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston the: ‘impact of this environment on social scientists’ experience of academic freedom is a matter of some concern for the quality of public debate and the health of democratic pluralism’ (2001, xiii). This was a comprehensive, three-phase study, involving a range of research strategies. Initially, there were interviews with twenty key informants, which were used to identify key areas of the topic and inform the design of a web-based questionnaire, which targeted one thousand social scientists across thirteen universities, and this data was the primary source of their report. The final phase

consisted of twenty in-depth interviews with selected academics who responded to the questionnaire in order to elaborate on the findings.

Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston conclude that in an environment of commercialization, universities now have to seek funds from outside sources rather than being wholly funded by government. These changes in the way that universities are funded have resulted in the expansion of student fees from international as well as domestic students, financial support for research from industry, monies raised by consultation and selling universities' services, and corporate styles of management.

Respondents in the study expressed dissatisfaction in what they saw as the effects of commercialization on academic freedom. Academic freedom was becoming undermined by work overload and the reduction of available research time, as the result of pressure on universities, and therefore academics, to develop other income sources. The pressure of attracting research funding from industry was seen as having an effect on research topics, channeling 'academic effort into safe, well-defined areas of research, rather than speculative ones' (2001, p. 45). Fee-based courses were having three effects. First, they benefited vocational disciplines rather those which were speculative and critical. Second, flexible on-line courses and distance learning were challenging intellectual ownership of materials, and third, courses for domestic and international students were thought to be compromising standards of teaching. Finally, the trend towards more corporate management structures weakened 'collegial decision making structures' (2001, p. 45).

The second study (Akerlind and Kayrooz, 2003) delved more deeply into the range of meanings of academic freedom amongst Australian social scientists, and involved phenomenographic methodology to investigate the range of meanings of academic freedom amongst social scientists in Australian universities. The rationale for this follow-up was identified as the growing concern regarding academic freedom in modern universities, the absence of clarity between researchers as to what is meant by academic freedom and what Akerlind and Kayrooz saw as the lack of empirical research in the

area. In order to do this, one item from the larger study was selected for further analysis and respondents were requested to respond to the following succinct question in writing:

Academic freedom is not a well-defined concept. We would like to know what academic freedom means to you'.  
(2003, p. 330)

The outcome of the research was that Akerlind and Kayrooz identified five qualitatively different ways of understanding academic freedom, which they further categorized into the negative 'freedom from', the 'positive freedom to' and finally academic roles and responsibilities. Their categories are as follows:

- (1) an absence of constraints on academics' activities;
  - (2) an absence of constraints, within certain self-regulating limits;
  - (3) an absence of constraints, within certain external-regulated limits;
  - (4) an absence of constraints, combined with active institutional support;
  - (5) an absence of constraints, combined with responsibilities on the part of academics.
- (2003, p. 340)

Akerlind and Kayrooz claim that these categories of different ways of defining academic freedom allow academics the opportunity to make judgments on which aspects of academic freedom are being focused upon and which are not in definitions and debates on academic freedom thus clarifying the issues.

### **How Christian are the faith-based universities in the United Kingdom?**

I have included this example of research as it comes from the perspective of an American researcher and academic and focuses upon some of the members of the then Council of Church Colleges and Universities. The rationale for this research was as Glanzer (2008) observed; whilst there are many contemporary studies of American Christian higher education this has not been so in the case of Christian or church-related colleges and universities in the United Kingdom. In order to fill what Glanzer identifies as a 'scholarly gap', his study 'Searching for the Soul of English Universities: An Exploration and Analysis of Christian Higher Education in England' focused on nine former Church of England teacher training colleges which had recently gained university status and were at that time members of the Council of Church Colleges and Universities. The research

examined 'the degree to which these universities have kept faith with their religious tradition' (2008, p. 164). Glanzer's study involved empirical research and data was obtained in the form of semi-structured interviews from a sample of vice-chancellors, chaplains and senior academics at five of the universities. Additional data gathering included documentary evidence from prospectuses and websites, and an analysis of the institutions' mission statements. In order to categorize the institutions in relation to the strength and influence of the faith-base, the data was then examined with reference to the typology of church-related colleges developed by Benne (2001) in the USA, Benne's typology is in four parts and defines the characteristics of colleges in descending order in relation to the strength of their Christian commitment. Benne (2001) defines his four categories as, orthodox, critical mass, intentionally pluralist and accidentally pluralist. In contrast to the USA, where Glanzer was an associate professor at Baylor, a private Baptist University, he found that there were no orthodox universities and that apart from Liverpool Hope University, which he considered close to Benne's (2001) criteria for a 'critical mass' institution, the other institutions were 'intentionally pluralist' and some veering towards 'accidentally pluralist' (p. 176).

It is in Glanzer's conclusions that the differences between English faith-based institutions and their counterparts in the USA are most apparent. He observes, quite tentatively, that some British scholars are not committed to the creation of overtly Christian universities, but instead 'they support the need for a faithful Christian remnant to exist in secularized English institutions' (2008, p.179) which makes them quite different from private sectarian Christian universities in the USA. In some ways this is of course not surprising because the faith-based institutions in the UK are no different from their secular counterparts in that they are reliant on government funding, and are subject to the same government legislation on employment rights and equality of opportunity, including race and religion, whilst private universities in the USA and Canada may have stringent policies with regards to appointments and requirements to adhere to faith statements which protect their religious identities.

Glanzer concludes his paper with the suggestions that the institutions might take the step into ‘foregoing the state support and control that inhibits academic innovation and theological faithfulness and to consider the private university model’ (2008, p. 180). In these circumstances, he argues that the institutions would be able to expand the genuine occupational requirement to include more management positions, be explicitly defined as Christian institutions, and develop more specialized faith-based centres. There are Christian academics that would support in principle the establishment of Christian universities, (Carr, 2004; Paterson, 2008; Sullivan, 2004; Thatcher 2004).

The four examples of empirical research reviewed in this section of my literature review exemplify the great diversity of issues that link to different perceptions of academic freedom within the academy as a whole. The papers presented by Hiebert, (2010) and Swezey and Ross, (2011) focus upon evangelical institutions and give voice to the viewpoint of academics who do not feel that their academic freedom is inhibited by the religious commitment of their universities. Rather, they are of the opinion that such institutions enable them to explore their religious convictions within a supportive community that they consider is not available to them within secular institutions.

By contrast, Tierney and Lechuga (2010) address academic freedom within the public arena in relation to controversial issues and the role academic freedom plays in promoting free enquiry within a democratic society. The authors suggest that the lack of academic freedom identified within the private for-profit institutions serves to ‘curtail thoughtful discussions of complex and controversial issues, (Tierney and Lechuga, p. 118). The Ward Churchill case at the University of Colorado, demonstrates the principle of academic freedom quite clearly. Although his opinions were considered inflammatory, repugnant and hurtful, and there was a public outcry at all levels across the country, whilst distancing them from his viewpoint, his university and members of the larger academic community supported his freedom to question and to express unpopular sentiments.

The research by Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston (2001), indicates the extent to which Australian academics view the changing nature of contemporary higher education, and in particular the results of commercialization, as restricting their academic freedom and represents a much wider general concern about constraints on academic freedom within universities in the twenty-first century. This is quite a different perspective on limitations to academic freedom, not relating to particular individual institutional restrictions, as in the private American Christian Colleges, nor to the links between academic freedom and controversial issues identified by Tierney and Lechunga (2010). As Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston comment ‘As such, the debate about academic freedom forms part of a larger debate as to the nature of academia and academic work today’ (2001, p. 328). In view of this statement, the research into the range of understandings of academic freedom by Akerlind and Kayrooz (2003) is timely and valuable to establishing greater clarity in relation to the differing aspects of academic freedom.

### **A summary of the review of literature**

The development of the concept of academic freedom as a broad, intellectual freedom within a specific group of institutions can be traced back to the first universities supported and developed by the Church in Europe and as such represent the establishment of an early form of institutional academic freedom. The development of scientific reasoning in the Enlightenment period in Europe, resulting in a different way of defining truth and knowledge, which formed the definitions of academic freedom in the modern secular university are central to the tensions between the arguments for Christian scholars’ conceptions of academic freedom and secular definitions. In particular, the development of the American Association of University Professors and the 1915 declaration of Principles of Academic freedom differentiated between Christian and secular universities and tensions were further exacerbated by the AAUP’s 1988 statement suggesting that Christian universities were inferior, because they placed institutional limits on academic freedom.

Arguments that support the compatibility of Christian scholarship and academic freedom such as definitions of academic freedom are confused and that full academic freedom is



an illusion are born out in the evidence of research by Akerlind and Karooz in which they sought to obtain data in a large-scale research project to clarify definitions of academic freedom. Furthermore, Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston's research indicates that the Australian academics in their research felt that there were a variety of pressures inherent in the commercialism of universities that restricted their academic freedom. Tierney and Lechuga (2010) suggest that complete academic freedom is necessary for the development of free enquiry within a democratic society, however research by Heibert (2010) and Swezey and Ross (2011) shows that for some academics, restrictions on academic freedom within institutions that have a Christian mission are considered compatible with academic freedom.

Glanzer (2008) considers that by the standards of American religiously affiliated institutions, the majority of English faith-based institutions within his survey would be within the lower scales of Benne's typology and only one institution would come close to Benne's criteria for a 'critical mass' institution. However, the English institutions are different from secular colleges and universities in that they have Church foundation, and the Cathedrals Group now represents a larger number of institutions than those within Glanzer's study. Furthermore, Arthur acknowledges that 'no Christian affiliated college or university today is Christian in the pervasive way that many once were. Nevertheless, few of them are completely secularized either' (Arthur, 2010, p. 18).

It is against this background that I have developed the research for my thesis. The following chapter sets out the research methodology to enquire into how academic freedom is conceived and addressed in faith-based institutions in England.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter states the central research question in my thesis and the subsidiary questions, which I have generated from my literature review and the arguments relating to academic freedom and faith-based institutions. I identify and outline the background to the research, and then describe my research design. The methods section explains how I made the decisions about an appropriate sample, the research tools, and the analysis of the data. Finally, I consider the ethical issues involved in carrying out the research in relation to the individual institutions and the human participants.

#### **The research question**

How is academic freedom conceived and addressed in faith-based universities and university colleges in England?

#### **Subsidiary questions**

1. How do senior managers in faith-based higher education institutions understand academic freedom in relation to the Christian mission?
2. What are the views of academics within the institutions with regard to academic freedom and the faith base?
3. How is academic freedom ensured in relation to research within the university?
4. How is any conflict between academic freedom and the Christian mission negotiated within the institutions?
5. Are there any formal or informal restrictions on academic freedom and if so, how is this justified by those in positions of authority?
6. Are there ways in which the existence of faith-based higher education institutions enhances academic freedom within the institution or in the wider academic community?

## **The background to the research**

Within higher education, the former Church of England teacher training colleges have formed an association of Christian institutions known as the ‘Cathedrals Group’. Launched in November 2009 and formerly known as the ‘Council of Church Universities and Colleges’, the Cathedrals Group has fourteen members in England comprising Church universities and university colleges founded by the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church. This group has a particular affiliation with the Church and religion that is unique in the English higher education system. Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the members of the group the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, gave the Lord Dearing Memorial Lecture (2009) entitled ‘No Place for God? Religious faith in higher education today’. Pamela Taylor (2009), Chair of the Cathedrals Group at the time of its inauguration stated: ‘There is clearly a positive role for religion and faith to play in the HE sector and we are committed to exploring how this can best be managed in today’s environment’. These faith-based institutions are thus in the process of establishing and re-branding themselves as a significant force within higher education.

The fourteen colleges and universities that constitute the Cathedrals group in England have two distinguishing characteristics that are significant in relation to an investigation of academic freedom within a discrete sector of higher education. The specific attributes of the Cathedrals Group are firstly, they all have a Christian foundation and the overwhelming majority of institutions have Instrument and Articles of Government that require key members of senior staff to adhere to a specific religious belief. Most Vice-Chancellors and Principals are required to be communicating members of the Church of England, the Catholic Church or the Methodist Church as a condition of their appointment. Unlike secular universities, these universities and university colleges are able to discriminate in senior appointments on religious grounds because the institutions have made a case that this should be a Genuine Occupational Requirement as there is a distinctive faith dimension in the origins and founding trust. Secondly, these are institutions that have only latterly achieved university and university college status, and

until recently have been predominantly teaching institutions with little history of research in comparison with more established universities.

Prior to the formation of the Cathedrals Group, the issue of academic freedom, was addressed in the publication *Mutual Expectations: The Church of England and Church Colleges/Universities*, A report of the Church of England Board of Education. Referring to the relationship between the Church, academic freedom and the membership of the then Council of Church Colleges and Universities the report stated:

The relationship is not uncontested. Those who would exclude religion from education or, more widely, from the public sphere, claim that there is incompatibility between Christian conviction and academic freedom. (2006, p. 6)

In response to any claims that Christian conviction and academic freedom are incompatible, the authors of the report are of the opinion that holding Christian values, in terms of academic freedom are no different from ‘the holding of materialist, secularist, feminist or liberal convictions’ (p.6). This perspective is consistent with many of the arguments put forward in academic literature in support and defense of Christian universities’ approaches to academic freedom within the UK and the USA. Many Christian academics consider that Christian universities have a different view of the nature of humanity and truth, which validates the argument that academic freedom is never unlimited and that the ethos of the faith-base legitimizes restrictions on academic freedom.

The fourteen members of the Cathedrals Group in England constitute the most recently established universities and university colleges within higher education, and in the light of the tensions between Christian institutions and academic freedom that are evident from relevant literature on the subject, I have identified them as an interesting context in which to carry out my research.

## **Research design**

As is apparent from my review of literature, many writers describe academic freedom as a complex issue, which has different meanings in different contexts. In order to address my main research question as to how academic freedom is conceived and addressed in the English faith-based institutions, I have employed a small-scale survey strategy, to include the fourteen members of the Cathedrals Group involving semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of participants to collect empirical qualitative data.

My intention was to achieve as wide and inclusive coverage of the fourteen institutions as my resources as a lone researcher allowed, at a specific point in time. My reasons for this were that, although the Cathedrals Group represents a coalition of faith-based universities, I felt that I could not assume that individual institution's approaches to academic freedom were consistent and uniform in practice and that for my research to be in any way representative, I would need to include all the institutions as data sources. For example, two universities have inserted clauses into their Instrument and Articles of Government, which particularly relate to limiting the academic freedom of their staff in relation to the Christian ethos of the institutions, whilst other members of the group have no such restrictions in their documentation. With this in mind, I decided that a survey strategy would enable me to generate data, which would give me an understanding of a broad cross-section of opinion across the group as opposed to a case study approach focusing on two or three institutions, which would only give a partial perspective on the research questions. This inclusive approach ensured that my research and the empirical data gathered was representative of the group as a whole and thus avoided bias in the overall sample by selecting particular institutions and neglecting others.

In this respect, I was influenced by the survey approach adopted by Glanzer (2008) in his enquiry into the relevance of the Christian identity in faith-based institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom, which included semi-structured interviews with senior managers of nine institutions and an analysis of documentary evidence. Although surveys are usually associated with a wide range of participants and research of a quantitative nature, the Cathedrals Group is a clearly defined category of institutions with similar

characteristics, which I considered to be compatible with a qualitative survey involving semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection.

### **Sampling**

The choice of participants in the research within a survey of the fourteen members of the Cathedrals Group was a critical decision, involving the selection of members of the institutions who would have the relevant credentials, experience and expertise to give in-depth information in relation to the research questions.

My sampling procedure was purposive (Cresswell, 2009; Denscombe, 2007; Flick, 2009; May, 2001), as I considered that I would obtain richer data from the research community, senior managers and the lecturers working in the institutions who were professionally affected by these policy decisions in their working practices. For this reason, I made the decision that the research sample would focus on two distinct groups, within the institutions. One group comprised of senior managers who were overseeing policy on research, and the other of academics who were teaching, writing and conducting research. In this way, I believed I would gain data from two groups of authoritative and credible sources of knowledge, but each would have a different perspective.

Senior managers have a strategic role in relation to articulating and reinforcing research policy within departments or faculties. This sample included managers who were involved in making strategic decisions in relation to the overall planning of research projects, ethical matters, the quality of the research and the supervision of students and staff studying for higher degrees within the parameters of the ethos of the institution. Senior research managers are answerable to the Vice-Chancellor in terms of their role within the university, whilst at the same time managing the overall thrust of research with their academic staff.

Academics on the other hand are on the receiving end of institutional policies, and their perceptions of academic freedom would be qualitatively different from those of the managers. They are not policy makers, but decisions made at a higher level of

management impact upon how they conduct their teaching, and areas of research. They will therefore have a different personal perspective on how academic freedom operates within their institutions.

The two samples were, therefore, 'fit for purpose' (May, 2001) as I considered that senior managers and academics were authoritative sources, as they would have professional knowledge and experience of academic freedom in respect of their roles within the institutions and would be credible sources of data.

Identifying senior academics who were involved in the management of research to approach for interview was relatively unproblematic, involving a search through the individual institutions' websites, sending explanatory emails requesting interviews and clearly stating the ethical issues that were involved in their informed participation. There are eleven senior managers from the Cathedrals Group in my sample.

Obtaining a similarly purposive sample of a second group of academics was far from straightforward. Identifying a sample of academics who would be interesting to interview was much more difficult and challenging, and they were a much wider, diverse population within the institutions. My sample had to fulfil certain criteria in that I wanted a range of participants, who would be able to offer relevant data as to their personal experiences of academic freedom that would link to my research questions. However, I was aware that the number of academics who might be willing to engage in research about academic freedom in their institutions was unknown, and in some respects, a hard to reach population.

In my decisions about sampling I also gave consideration to the fact that a large proportion of the institutions' degrees were directed towards professional qualifications such as initial teacher training, nursing and social work, the contents of which are prescribed and regulated by outside agencies, for example the Office for Standards in Education in the case of initial teacher training. Whilst academics in these departments might feel that their academic freedom was constrained by government policy, this was

beyond any constraints that might pertain to the faith base, and I was therefore more curious about academics who were engaged in other areas of the institutions' work. My initial strategy was to identify academics who were researching topics that are unusual for Christian institutions, to ascertain what their experiences of academic freedom were. Given the strong feelings in the Christian community within the United Kingdom and internationally in relation to homosexuality and sexuality, I considered that this might be a possible area to consider when approaching academics to interview. Despite the fact that ten of the colleges and universities had members of staff researching sex, gender and sexuality, and although four academics expressed an interest in my research and requested copies of the interview questions, the disappointing outcome was that only one actually agreed to participate in my research.

To locate a sufficiently large number of academic participants across the range of the institutions required me to undertake a range of purposive sampling strategies. In order to address the problem of how to select a sample of academics that might have something of interest to say about academic freedom, I was influenced by Lee (1993) in relation to conducting research on sensitive topics. In particular, I found his accounts as to how access might be gained to a sub-set of participants within a specific population of possible respondents informative, and from my reading, I considered there was the potential to use similar methods to gain access to a sample of academics that would be willing to take part in my research. Although Lee's research focused upon the ways and means to gain access to deviant or rare populations, I felt the processes he described could be applied to gaining access to other groups who have similar interests in a particular area of study. I therefore used two methods described by Lee to identify a wider range of academics to approach as possible participants in the interviews.

The first method I adopted was one that Lee (1993) referred to as 'multi-purposing', which is a method he identified which could be used to reach a population of interest:

Access to a special population can be achieved by 'piggybacking' the sampling of the special population on to an existing survey. (p. 63)



Through my work I was aware of the Academics for Academic Freedom website and utilised Lee's example of 'piggybacking' to locate academics who were working in faith-based institutions and that were interested enough in academic freedom to sign up to the website and subsequently contacted them to ask if they were willing to participate in my research. I acknowledge that this course of action is open to criticism, in that this could have resulted in a rather distorted sample of participants, but I would support this decision in two ways. First, the participants fulfilled two criteria as they had an interest in academic freedom and experience of faith-based institutions. Secondly, just because these academics felt strongly about academic freedom, it would be wrong to assume that this necessarily meant that they were critical of institutions with a faith-base.

The second strategy proposed by Lee, involved networking and using 'snowball sampling' to gain access to a wider population of informants in research, and I found this the most successful strategy to generate a sample of academics that were willing to take part in the interviews. Although I have referred specifically to Lee in my sampling strategies, snowballing is a well-known and widely recognised technique in research (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Denscombe, 2007; May, 2001; Newby, 2010).

The snowball sampling technique works by an interviewee or respondent identifying other possible respondents for the researcher. The assumption is that people with the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that we are interested in are more likely to know others with similar attitudes, beliefs or behaviours than the general population.

Newby (2010 p. 249)

Denscombe (2007) is of the opinion that 'Snowballing is an effective technique for building up a reasonable sized sample, especially when used as a part of a small-scale research project' (p. 18). Of the two strategies I have outlined above, snowballing was the most effective. I believe this was helped by being what could be described as an insider researcher as I was already employed at one of the institutions and was by virtue of this familiar with other members of the Cathedrals Group. Familiarity with the institutions was also very useful as I was able to identify and contact academics that I knew were

supportive of Christian higher education, either by their publications or by reputations, to ensure that there was a balance of opinion in the sample. I eventually interviewed eleven academics by employing this variety of sampling strategies,

### **Method of data collection**

I collected data relating to the senior managers' and academics' conceptions of academic freedom through semi-structured individual interviews. I made the decision to employ interviews as a research tool as I considered that this research method offered me the opportunity to explore in depth the participants' views on academic freedom within a range of different institutional contexts thus enabling me to explore how academic freedom was conceived and addressed across the Cathedrals Group as a whole. Interviews were also a means of obtaining data about the participants' conceptions of academic freedom and the impact of policy, if any, in relation to the Christian mission and individual academic freedom. In view of the focus of my research which involved complex and specific personal knowledge and understanding of the relationship between academic freedom and the faith-base, I felt that face-to-face interviews were the most suitable research method 'a method that is attuned to the intricacy of the subject matter' (Denscombe, 2007, p.174).

Firstly, the nature of the social interaction of an interview enabled me to collect detailed and in depth data for analysis that would not be possible through questionnaires, as during interviews I was able to probe responses to elicit further clarification of the points made. Secondly, this study focuses upon what might be interpreted as sensitive issues and I considered that face-to-face interaction would enable me to establish a rapport with the interviewees and elicit more open responses to my questions in the course of a two-way conversation. Thirdly, the interviews gave me the opportunity to talk to those whose work is affected by decisions made at the highest levels of governance and management regarding academic freedom at the institutions, and explore in a reciprocal manner whether the faith-base had any relevance to their research interests and academic freedom.

Placing my chosen interview technique within the context of research literature, Fontana and Frey (2008), identify two types of face-to-face individual interviews, structured interviewing and unstructured interviewing, representing a continuum from following a highly structured set of 'pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories' (p. 24) to an unstructured, 'open-ended, in-depth (ethnographic) interview' (p.129). I considered that neither of these types of interview would be suitable to enable me to gather empirical data to answer my research questions. Although with structured interviews I would be able to have a clear 'script' of questions and this would have ensured that the questions were addressed in a systematic manner, in my consideration a structured interview would have been too constraining, and there would be too much resemblance to a verbal questionnaire. I felt that the approach was too rigid and impersonal to elicit any rich in-depth responses from the participants and that this approach would render the interviews almost mechanical in nature; and as I was seeking qualitative data, something of the essence of a conversation would be lost and there could be a lack of spontaneity. I also rejected the idea of conducting an unstructured interview, as given the nature of the research questions and focus there were clear issues, themes and topics that formed the overarching framework of the interview as a whole. I did, however construct a schedule of open-ended interview questions to ensure consistency and continuity between my main and subsidiary research questions and the data I collected. I used the schedule of questions rather as an aide memoir to structure the interview process, and did not adhere to them rigidly in a sequential manner, as I felt there were distinct advantages to adopting a more flexible semi-structured approach to my interviews. Given the nature of an interview as a social encounter between the participants and myself, during semi-structured interviews there were opportunities for flexibility to follow up responses that I felt were of particular significance, or change the order of questions according to the replies. The interviews therefore were of a more fluid nature and there was the possible space to introduce unexpected themes, whilst at the same time ensuring that the data gathered remained relevant to my research question. Within this less structured interview situation, I found there were greater opportunities for interviewees to speak freely, expand upon their ideas and express their thoughts.

The respective tables of interview questions for academics and senior managers are included in appendices B and C.

### **Handling and analysis of interview data**

The first step in generating data was to record the interviews, after gaining permission to do so. I addressed the issue of permission to record the interviews within the informed consent documentation, sent out prior to the actual meeting, but I also verified permission verbally before starting the interviews. As recording interviews is a common practice in research, I do not believe it was an inhibiting factor, as the participants were familiar with the process in the course of their own work. The twenty-two interviews varied in length from over an hour to a relatively short thirty minutes, depending on the individual participant's responses to the interview questions, thus generating some seventeen hours of audio data.

I spent time listening to the recordings before I started the initial transcription, because I wanted to get the feel of the interview whilst it was fresh in my mind. The transcription of the audio recording was the initial process in transforming the interaction of the interview into text for analysis. Although it was very time consuming, I transcribed the audio recordings myself. I found that carefully listening to the tapes brought me closer to the data and I was then able to begin to think about the responses and content and be involved in the analysis from the outset, rather than paying a professional to transcribe the tapes for me. In addition, having given assurances to those taking part that the interviews would be confidential, I believe it was ethically appropriate to complete this task personally.

With regard to the manner in which the transcriptions are presented, Flick (2009, p. 303)) considers that 'The documentation of data is not just a technical step in the research process'. With such a large number of interviews, it was essential that the transcriptions were organized in such a way that they were manageable, coding was clear and that the data was easily located and retrieved as the analysis became more complex. I allocated the transcripts of individual interviews an anonymous identification code and transcribed

the interview recordings in a double spaced format, each line numbered for ready reference with a wide margin to the right to allow space for notes and comments. After completing the initial transcription, I then went back and re-checked the recording against the text I had produced to ensure that the data produced was accurate and reliable. The majority of the transcripts were five thousand words in length.

### **The process of analysis**

Before I attempted any analysis at all, I read and re-read the transcriptions so that I was completely familiar with the content. The initial process of data analysis was closely linked to the interview questions and the transcriptions of individual interviews. Guidance in the process of data analysis was developed in relation of Flick's (2006, 2009) description of thematic coding. Flick (2009, pp. 318-319) describes the interpretation of the material as a procedure involving stages. In stage one the interviews may be regarded as a series of case studies in which each one is analysed individually and the main topics are categorized and summarized in relation to the research questions. From this initial analysis, themes are then generated, and in stage two are cross-checked with further interview data, generating units of meaning and categories from which more abstract concepts can be drawn. This is an iterative rather than a linear process and involves combing backwards and forward in the data, until themes and issues are identified to form the basis for reporting the findings. This iterative process is similar to that described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 492) 'Coding is the process of disassembling and reassembling data'.

I approached the interpretation of each interview text methodically and identified themes within the individual responses to each of the questions. When I had completed this for each of the twenty-two transcripts, I cross-referenced the themes I had identified within the boundaries of the interview questions for comparison across the range of respondents. In the final stage of my analysis I linked the themes I had generated to my main research and subsidiary questions to inform my findings which were grounded in the empirical data. In taking this qualitative analytical approach to the raw data gathered from the interviews, I am aware of my own reflexive position in the process as a researcher in that

I cannot entirely dismiss my own perspective including personal values and beliefs with respect to my role in constructing a coherent analysis of the data.

### **Ethical issues**

In this section, ethical issues are considered in relation to the research design, the processes of data collection and analysis, and finally the research report. In carrying out this research, I had to give consideration to a range of ethical issues, and in this process, I discovered that ethical practices in research are more complex than paying lip service to a set of guidelines. The decision to interview senior managers and academics within a closely defined group of institutions meant that there were significant ethical implications within the scope of the overall enquiry and I had to consider how my research could impact upon the reputations of the institutions, and the professional and personal welfare of the participants from whom I gathered the data.

I identified two main issues in relation to ethics and the institutions. The first was that I was aware that the focus of my research within the Cathedrals Group, and the contested nature of academic freedom within faith-based institutions, was potentially a sensitive area of research. There had been critical press coverage in *The Times Higher Education* magazine in the past, suggesting that academic freedom in two institutions in the faith-based sector of higher education might be compromised. In these circumstances, I had to consider measures that I would take to protect the reputation of the institutions, should any controversial data be disclosed during interviews. The second issue was the question of anonymity. As I have emphasized earlier in the rationale for my research design and methodology, the Cathedrals Group is a newly formed group of recently established universities and university colleges with a shared heritage and Christian mission, and is therefore easily identifiable within the higher education community.

In order to address the issue of institutional anonymity, whilst I have referred to the 'Cathedrals Group', in my survey sample I have not identified the individual institutions by name or denomination. The information as to which institutions took part in the data gathering is confidential. In planning the research methodology, it was never my

intention to make this a comparative study, as the individual institutions are not the primary focus of the research, but rather the focus is upon the construction and conceptions of academic freedom across a particular group of higher education institutions. My planned method of data analysis, did not involve any comparisons between attitudes towards academic freedom, between individual institutions and the findings and discussion are presented in such a way that there are no references to any particular institution.

I took the following measures to protect the reputations of the institutions. Whilst I have referred to the 'Cathedrals Group', I have ensured that in my research findings, discussion and conclusions I have not attributed any controversial data to any particular institution. In my analysis of the data I have been careful to ensure that where infringements of academic freedom were disclosed I have not made any false or potentially damaging generalisations whilst maintaining the integrity of the research.

In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in the research, quotations from interview transcripts are not attributed to any individual, their title or discipline. To ensure that any readers of my research will not be able to identify the participants, I have used the generic terms 'senior managers' and 'academics' to differentiate between the two groups in my sample. I have coded individual quotations from the interview transcripts by number, and have made no reference to the academics' disciplines to ensure that their contributions remain anonymous. In terms of confidentiality which Wengraf (2001) identifies as an ethical requirement, which requires 'that certain confidential materials may not be used in any form however anonymized' (p.187), in recognition of the potential vulnerability of participants, I have exercised caution in my handling and analysis of the interview data. With confidentiality in mind, I made decisions not to include some sections of the interview transcripts in my data analysis. The few instances where I have made decisions to omit data, serve to ensure that no participants would be exposed to a difficult or dangerous position in relation to their employment as a result of my research, as well as ensuring there was no damage to the reputation of any institution, or the Cathedrals Group as a whole.

I took the following precautions in relation to the participants in the research. To avoid any deception, I made sure that the participants were fully informed, and received explicit information about the nature and focus of my research and the potential ethical implications, in my initial email contact asking for their participation in the interviews. In this initial contact I stated my position as a part-time Doctor of Education student at the Institute of Education working on my final thesis, explaining that I was focussing on higher education institutions with a faith-base, and in particular on academic freedom.. I informed possible participants that I was conducting a survey across the Cathedrals Group, and that my research was of a qualitative nature involving semi-structured interviews. I also informed participants that I would make copies of the interview questions available to them prior to our meeting, if that was what they would prefer. I gave assurances that any data would be treated as confidential and that I would personally transcribe recordings of the interviews. Additionally, with respect to the autonomy of those taking part, I made assurances that if requested I would make copies of the transcription available, and would respect their right to make any amendments they felt necessary, and to delete from my findings any data that might cause them professional harm. In practice, three respondents asked for transcripts and I respected their right to amend or delete any data with which they were uncomfortable. All participants were informed in writing that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time, but fortunately, none did so. A copy of my initial email is included in appendix A.

In the construction of my interview questions I gave careful consideration to the sensitivity of my questions, particularly in relation to academics whose research areas may have caused tensions with their academic freedom within a Christian institution. As opposed to senior managers, where the focus of the interviews had a more institutional emphasis, interviews with academics involved questions of a more personal nature regarding their research within the context of a Christian institution. To this end, careful consideration was given to the wording of my interview questions to ensure that interviewees would not feel threatened or uncomfortable and that, within an open-ended interview schedule, the participants would not feel coerced into disclosing information



that might cause personal or professional concern. When I received a positive response to my request for an interview, I offered the respondents the opportunity to see the interview questions prior to our meeting if they so wished and, when requested, duly forwarded the questions well in advance of the interview date.

In these ways, I took steps to avoid any deception, and ensured that the academics involved in the research had the right to know from the outset, explicitly what my research was about and receive assurances that the enquiry would be conducted with professional honesty and openness. With respect for the autonomy of the individual institutions and individuals, I ensured that informed consent was given with a transparent description of the aims and nature of my research, and how the data collected would be used.

With regard to trust in my position as a researcher, I was aware that I had an obligation in the analysis of the data to provide an accurate account of my research findings, and take care to ensure that any interpretations were thoroughly grounded in the data generated from the interview transcriptions. In my findings section I have maintained anonymity by referring to the participants by number codes and omitted any references to their disciplines or institutions, which may have made them recognizable. In my final discussion, I have protected the anonymity of the institutions by omitting any mention of the names of the individual institutions.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) confidentiality and anonymity applies to all the data I have collected and to this end all transcripts were transcribed by me, and will not be available to any other person or persons either electronically or on paper. All data stored is anonymous and will be deleted when my research is concluded.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

Despite their shared historical roots as Church Colleges of Education, as they have amalgamated, expanded and developed into universities and university colleges, they have become a diverse group in practice. As one participant commented some institutions were 'higher up the candle' than others. Three university colleges in the group have Catholic foundations, some Church of England and yet others are amalgamations between the Catholic Church and the Church of England. Many institutions have also been merged with secular institutions. Although they all still retain a Christian Foundation, the extent to which this is currently evident is very varied. There is a great variety in the size of the institutions, and the number of students. Some have achieved university status with research degree awarding powers, and others are still undergoing development from university colleges to universities.

To illustrate some of the differences in this introduction and the commitment to their Church foundations, two universities have established Centres for Christian Education with professorial chairs, however yet another institution no longer has a Theology department, which at one time was a significant feature of all the former Church Colleges of Education.

The following findings are based on a series of eleven interviews with senior managers and eleven academics from a variety of disciplines within fourteen of the fifteen members of the Cathedrals group in the United Kingdom. One institution did not participate as I was informed that they were currently reviewing their policies and procedures in relation to academic freedom and one head of research from another institution declined to take part. The interviews were on average of forty-five minutes duration generating responses of four thousand to five thousand words of written text per interview.

Senior managers are coded as follows: (SM2), (SM3), (SM4), (SM5), (SM6), (SM14), (SM16), (SM18), (SM20), (SM21), (SM22).

Academics are coded as follows: (A1), (A7), (A8), (A9), (A10), (A11), (A12), (A15), (A15), (A17), (A19). Responses have been grouped under the categories of the interview questions.

### **1. Academics' understandings of academic freedom**

In response to the question 'What is your understanding of academic freedom?' prior to their interviews this had not really been a consideration for A19, A9 as exemplified by their initial responses to the question

It's interesting, because to tell you the truth it is not something I have given a great deal of thought to before you contacted me. I suppose because I have never really had to. (A19)

Gosh, I don't know I haven't really thought about it. (A9)

A rather vague definition was expressed by academic A13 as follows:

I guess the – it's a real lay definition – it's the right to, to research and to practice in ways that I think are ethical to others. So I think aware ethically. (A13)

Respondent A1 however, gave a very clear definition emphasizing autonomy as an academic in the areas of work, which he was paid to carry out. Whilst at the same time acknowledging that there were restraints relating to academic expertise, he robustly emphasized his individual academic freedom within that discipline, emphasizing his own self-determination:

So there is clearly a constraint about what I ought to be free to engage in, but it, that constraint is negotiable. So I can't come to the university and just say that I want to talk about French literature because I am employed to work in education and have a particular responsibility to students to develop research in that area and so on. But, within that area I should have complete freedom to think and to talk and write in ways that, in ways not constrained by the views and opinions of my employers. (A1)

Two academics (A10), (A11) included free speech within their definitions, although with different perspectives:

A10 included free speech explaining that it was a variation of freedom of speech and freedom of thought and that genuinely held ideas are not censored. There were references to what was seen as political correctness within the institution

What it isn't, is the censorship of ideas for whatever reason. I think whether they are well meaning reasons or whether they are kind of you know reasons to do with promoting a particular party line or supporting a power base, or what have you. But academic freedom is, if you like, where any argument could be put forward and received on its merits essentially as opposed to accepted or dismissed because it's in fashion or not (A10).

Academic (A11) held the belief that academic freedom and freedom of speech should be absolute, and made no distinction between academics and other members of society. Academic freedom was not a specific right of academics nor specifically rooted in the university.

I think that free speech in society should be free and that freedom of speech is an absolute, so anything goes. I think that is important in society, that you have that for the good of political discussion and debate in a vibrant public world and in the academy or in the university. I think that is equally applicable in the university as it is in society and vice versa, so I wouldn't say there's any one specific thing that makes academic freedom different from anybody else in society. (A11)

Constraints and certain boundaries were included in the definitions of academic freedom by three academics (A12), (A8) and (A15).

Academic (A12) identified legality as the key issue, whilst also stating that there should be no institutional constraints:

My understanding of academic freedom is that within the constraints of law members of staff are permitted to carry out research which I think the intention would be, the institutional intent would be would not be constrained by the institution or any affiliations it has. That would be my understanding. But, the key issue is within the constraints of the law. (12)

Academic (A8) emphasized the importance of rigorous debate about academic freedom, and that there were limits, but that debate was needed as to where they are. The swing towards managerialism and bureaucracy was seen as a threat: ‘Gets rid of the whole idea of what an academic is supposed to be’.

One academic (A15) referred to the institution and accountability/responsibility to the organisation.

Show sensitivity to the organisation that they belong to and that, that is really something that they have to demonstrate themselves but in the end, they of course are accountable to that organisation for their exercise of that sensitivity (15).

Whilst two academics made specific reference to the institution nine did not. There was no reference to the faith-base by any respondents.

## **2. Senior managers’ understandings of academic freedom within their institutions**

‘How would you say academic freedom is understood here?’

Four responses indicated a personal lack of awareness of the institution’s position on research and academic freedom.

A further four asserted that academic freedom differed very little from notions of academic freedom in secular universities. ‘I think it is very strongly defended, actually I don’t think the faith-institution has affected that’. (SM22)

In one senior academic’s opinion (SM4), particular worldviews should be addressed and given attention in academic activities in universities with a religious foundation. However this was the only example.

The wider freedom and flourishing of our society benefits from pluralism, that is, a variety of worldviews jostling for allegiance and engagement, and also a variety of institutions from which to choose. So long as entry into those institutions is taken freely and that people can exit freely, there is no reason why some universities cannot be a religious foundation and give particular attention to how their worldview contributes to academic endeavor and the priorities they address. (SM4)

Four responses indicated that senior managers were unaware of any institutional consensus regarding academic freedom and that academic freedom was not a subject that was discussed.

SM2 Stated, 'I am not sure about that actually because no-one ever talked to me about academic freedom at all', SM5 Said that it was not really a consideration. SM18 suggested that there was a lack of communal understanding in the institution.

That's really an interesting question in that I am not really sure that I would know other people's views. I am not sure I feel confident talking about a mutual understanding. We don't have a policy that explicitly addresses academic freedom. .... I don't recall ever having had a discussion about academic freedom within the institution. (SM18)

There was further evidence that there was a lack of a general understanding of what academic freedom might mean, and that this was something that was dealt with at a higher level of management. SM3 seemed to be disengaged from with any potential conflicts and was very tentative in his response.

'That is a very difficult question to answer. There was a bit of a confrontation about this a couple of years ago that I happen to know about and the management point of view was that there was no issue with academic freedom. That particular person was complaining that his academic freedom was being infringed upon and I think I tended to agree with the official statement.' (SM3)

SM16 suggested that there was no institutional concept of academic freedom because its core business was in professional qualifications and therefore academic freedom was constrained by government policy in relation to the various professional degrees that were offered at the university.

There were assertions in four responses (SM6, SM14, SM20, SM21) that academic freedom was understood in the same way as in secular institutions, that the faith-base of the institution was not an issue, and there were no differences.

‘How would I say academic freedom is understood at the university? I think you have two aspects to that. One is the over all complexion of academic freedom within higher education. So, how it is understood will be affected by I think how long someone has been in education. How much they are aware of union attitudes on that, organisations such as the CAFAS campaign for freedom and academic standards that’s the general understanding ...individuals bring with them to the university and their perception of their own autonomy as researchers.’ (SM6)

(SM14) ‘Not a lot different from any other institution, academic freedom would be protected as long as the academic work was of an appropriate academic standard. and that that they should be able to do that without interference and without pressure from either the university or through those people associated with the university.’ (SM14)

SM20 commented that independent academic research would be supported, ‘Without hindrance from any particular censure relating to faith or otherwise. As long as they stay within the bounds of civility, decency and the law’ (SM20).

SM21 was clear that although academic freedom was a priority within the university and that the faith-base was not a consideration.

‘Academic freedom is always on the radar, whether it’s got any religious context, that’s where the schism would be in the sense that in terms of academic freedom we don’t judge it from a religious base. There is the maximum academic freedom inside ethical boundaries that the university sets’ (SM21).

### **3. Academics’ understandings of academic freedom within their institutions**

Three academics (A11, A19, A17) felt that the institutional understanding of academic freedom was no different from other universities.

Well to best of my knowledge, in my experience academic freedom in the university operates in exactly the same way that it would do in any other university. (A11)

I am not aware of any policies. I have never felt that there was an issue with academic freedom. I have never felt that I wasn't able to pursue a piece of research because of any political reasons. I have never felt that in any sense at all. (A17)

I would say it was on a par with other universities that I have had experience of. (A19)

Only one academic referred to the faith-base and academic freedom.

I am referring to the place where I was working and I would say that the academic freedom there was largely unfettered. It was part of its identity as an institution, as a Church institution, that it had academic freedom and that was fiercely defended from within and so that was the interpretation partly of a church identity that that meant that it had academic freedom. (A15)

Four academics indicated that there was a lack of clarity in relation to knowledge of any official policies or the institutions' approach to academic freedom.

Well – I don't think it is. You never talk about it, you never hear it mentioned until something goes wrong. (A9)

That's actually very difficult to know. I don't claim to be an authority I have to say about how this institution promotes or relates to academic freedom altogether, I can only give you an impression. (A10)

One of the things that, I don't know that we focus on that as a concept and I think that what actually happens is, what it is, is that those are issues that operate in the background rather than explicitly. So, it would be very easy for me to say I believe that we have academic freedom, because I am not obviously constrained. Nobody every comes along and says you can't teach this or you can't teach that, so it's not explicit. (A17)

I would guess, I can look on the website. We have our Research committees and Teaching and Learning. (A13)



#### **4. Does the university's faith-base inform the research agenda?**

(SM6) It doesn't impact upon staff. I have never felt uneasy in any way or form.

One academic who was a committed Christian identified the ethos of institution as influential in the ways that he/she thought:

You won't be surprised to hear that I actually agree with that. Because I am convinced that nobody's approach to knowledge is free of if you like a faith basis in the sense that I think that everybody's view or interpretation of what they are learning is shaped by what people call a fallibility structure, a framework a control belief. There are certain fundamentals that shape the way you think and institutions inevitably carry those sorts of shaping beliefs related to their structures and the way they operate. (SM2)

There was evidence that the faith base of the universities had some influence on research, from five responses and that this was rooted in the historical origins of many of the universities as Church of England teacher training colleges, but that it didn't pervade the whole institution.

There is a substantial pocket of students in education who are doing research connected with the Church of England mission in education, but that's their choice. I don't think, I mean that could be the case in any university. I mean maybe the fact that, given that the education faculty was set up a long, long time ago to support Church of England schools, then you would find people in it who are interested in that sort of thing. I don't think there is a policy there. (SM3)

It doesn't inform the overall research agenda. I'd say it does have an impact in a number of areas. So for example, we had a research centre set up about two years ago (name deleted) and if we weren't an institution with a Christian foundation, I am not sure that the individuals that wanted to set it up would come to us because it is largely an external one. We also prior to that had advertised for an appointed a chair in thought and spirituality, which had a strong Christian focus. So that's that was in one faculty. I'd say the education department there is also a commitment, certainly amongst some members of staff which is encouraged in working with religious groups and bodies which might be Christian so I would say the university's commitment to religious education and some ways

ecumenical education also impinges on the research agenda there. The third area I'd say that where it is the most obvious one theology and religious studies which is in the department of humanities and has long been seen as an area of research strength in the university. (SM6)

I think the mission and the values of the university towards social justice, inclusion, mobility will have influenced the research community maybe it is because we attract people who see it as an environment in which it is productive and they can flourish..., but I think it has some influence. It is not the overriding influence, but I think it has some influence. (SM14)

I would say there is probably some kind of informal net work that is still there, because some of the academics are still there. One or two people who are in that area – teacher education, RE. (SM16)

I think it is fair to say, when we think about our strengths in philosophy, in theology or religious beliefs they are big research strengths for the university because of where the university has come from. (SM21)

However, responses from three heads of research indicated that they did not consider that there were any explicit links between research and the faith-base.

There is no direct connection between our research agenda and the faith base of the University. I suppose there is some vague indirect link in that we have a Theology department which has its roots in the faith roots of the University; however this department pursues its own research; some informed by a personal/professional faith perspective and some by a secular perspective. None of it is explicitly linked to the faith base of the University. (SM20)

Senior manager (SM5) indicating that the influence of the Christian foundation was negligible in relation to research made an even more forceful statement.

The foundation has never entered consciousness. Could be there and not even know it had a faith base. (SM5)

The loss of the Theology department and subsequent degrees in theology were seen to be a significant influencing factor in distancing the faith base from the research agenda by SM18:

That's probably quite a complex question in that we don't have a Theology department. We used to have a very separate theology department. We don't have a theology degree programme now. So the simple answer is the faith base doesn't inform the research agenda. (SM18)

**5. Are there ways in which the Christian foundation of the university enhances the academic freedom of those involved in research?**

The considered statement of one academic (A15) identified the difficulty in answering the question as to whether there are ways in which the Christian foundation enhances academic freedom by stating that, 'A Christian foundation is a very, very variable creature and therefore it depends which one we are talking about' (A15). The wide variety of responses to this question by both academics and heads of research reflects the diversity of opinion in this respect ranging from a rejection of any difference through to claims of enhancement and potential enhancement.

(SM6) Unequivocally rejected that the faith base enhanced academic freedom.

It sits somewhere to being agnostic at that point of just politely saying no. I could only say it might give a little bit more muscle to those interested in the theology research agenda, but I think that's a different point altogether. (6)

(SM3) also could not agree that the Christian foundation enhanced academic freedom and distanced himself from what he saw as claims made by the university in reply to the question.

I am sure it makes claims in that direction, but it doesn't make any sense to me, because I am not involved in that way of thinking. So, I know that there are claims, but I am not sure that they are – I don't think that there is any basis upon which to claim a special ownership for that academic freedom. I stand outside where that claim would come from – I don't see what is special about it. There are certain things that some people put under the heading of Christian values

and I can't see why they are under that heading, they could be anywhere. (SM3)

SM18 also voiced the notion of Christian values and how these could be connected with academic freedom tentatively as follows:

I am not conscious of, nobody has articulated that to me, and again I don't think here it is an explicit influence. .... The whole idea of academic freedom I think is probably connected with Christian values around tolerance and that kind of thing I expect, not being a theologian myself. So I would say explicitly, I am not aware of any ways in which the foundation enhances academic freedom, but implicitly it may well underpin. (SM18)

Academics A19 and A9 were of the view that it made no difference:

I think the short answer is, it would be not particularly. I am just trying to think because my first experience was at a university that wasn't a faith university, and I just can't really detect any discernible difference. (A19)

Whilst not suggesting that there was an enhancement of academic freedom within his institution, academic (A11) appeared to be suggesting that there was a degree of tolerance and encouragement of different views. However, he felt that this generally had a biblical focus.

I would say that, I don't think it necessarily enhances it. I think it can be tolerant of different views and in some cases actively encourage different views, but the active encouragement of different views is usually around the particular interpretation of something. So for example, it would be say an interpretation of biblical texts. (A11)

Academic (A7) also commented upon the potential for a Christian foundation to encourage a pluralism of views, but this answer was supposition rather than actual experience whilst working at the university.

I think it would enhance your academic freedom in the sense that if the Christian foundation, if it is one that is a kind of liberal Christianity which encourages a pluralism of view. Yes, I suppose it could enhance your freedom that way. (A7)

Claims that the Christian foundation created a particular liberating ethos within their institutions were made by two academics (A12), (A17), but neither response to the interview question made any explicit connection with this and academic freedom.

Most people say there is something about the ethos that is liberating rather than constraining. (A12)

The perceived absence of constraint, does not however guarantee academic freedom for those working within the institution. Again, in the following transcript, inclusiveness and the notion of a particular ethos that the academic believed to be engendered within a Christian foundation are equated with academic freedom for those who work in the institution.

To be perfectly honest, I think the fact that we are a Church foundation college has very little practical effect in terms of delivery. I think what it does is, it creates quite an important ethos within the college, so that when people come to work here, what they know is that this is a Christian foundation college, which is based on a real commitment to inclusivity, one of the reasons I chose to work here to be honest. (A17)

Referring to the historical Christian base of the institution academic (A10) felt that academic freedom had been enhanced and explained his reasons in biblical terms.

I think in the long term it has probably has enhanced it enormously, because there is a notion deeply in Christianity that all people are equal under the eyes of God. So if you start there, therefore, all people have minds and deserve to be educated, who have opinions, who deserve to be listened to who should get a chance to cultivate these. (A10)

Academics with a clear commitment to Christian higher education welcomed the opportunity to integrate their faith into their academic work with the curriculum and students within the universities and to focus their research into exploring and developing a Christian perspective within the academy. There was a sense that for the Christian academic faith-based institutions presented opportunities for academic freedom that they felt they would not experience in a more secular environment and that such institutions were places where they could openly create spaces for a Christian worldview, which they felt was lacking, but desirable, elsewhere in higher education.

To me it's a breath of fresh air for someone like me to feel that there is an institution which welcomes me to bring my faith into my thinking and to be able to act as an affirmed member of the institution...and experience academic freedom in a way that I don't in other environments. (SM2)

SM2 regarded the faith base as a positive influence and that it enhances academic freedom.

I personally don't think that academic freedom is constrained by a faith based I think it is enhanced..... I think if you belong to any community you are constrained by the ethos and culture of that community and I think that is legitimate. (SM2)

There was some evidence of the influence of American Christian universities. Senior manager (SM4) referred to the example of North American Christian universities where 'Many of them have greater academic freedom and quality, and have the confidence to say that now we need a countervailing voice.' (SM4) Following on from the theme that North American Christian universities have more academic freedom for Christian scholarship, another Christian academic (A15) stated that he believed that 'This country badly needs Christian universities and colleges partly in order to create the academic freedom that I think is not there at the moment. And that is the freedom to do study of areas of Christian interest in a way that I do see exists in some universities in countries like the United States.' (A15)

Looking forward to what he considered the potential for the enhancement of academic freedom in faith-based universities, academic (A15) also stated:

Anyway, my thoughts are first of all that it could, in this country privilege, and prioritise the Christian aspects of academic freedom, I haven't particularly seen that happening, it could be that, and it can be a champion of academic freedom. In other words, it can act as a bastion within the universities politic, champion academic freedom because it is the sort of thing that many Christians are very motivated to protect. (A15)

The data here suggests that some Christian academics perceive academic freedom in faith-based universities to offer greater freedom to conduct certain types of faith-based

research, however this does not represent greater academic freedom per se in the terms that might be the case in secular universities. There is some limited awareness of the American model of Christian universities.

However all respondents, as exemplified by the following extract, from interview (SM14) do not support this.

It is more likely to be a constraining influence. No I don't agree with that I think in a secular university in theory everything is open you could argue that in an institution where there is a framework, either a Christian framework or as, in our case, certain values from our Christian foundation, that in itself could be a constraining factor. (SM14)

## **6. The Christian foundation constrains the academic freedom of those involved in research**

There were short negative responses to the question as to whether the Christian foundation constrained academic freedom from eight senior managers (SM6), (SM6), (SM18), (SM20), (SM21), (SM22).

SM14 gave an unequivocal response:

In this university no, absolutely no, and we would seek to defend academic freedom on that basis. So if we had people who were seeking to put their views which weren't in line with the Church in Church schools, we wouldn't be sympathetic to that constraint. So the simple answer to that one is no. (SM14)

It was the consideration of SM3 that this was a personal perception by individual academics rather than an actual reality.

I think that people might think that it does, but I have never seen any evidence that it does. But this is where it gets complicated, if somebody feels that their academic freedom is being infringed then that feeling is real but I can't myself think of any cases where standing on the side I could see what the link would be. There is no evidence as far as I can see. (SM3)

SM4 gave me his very well considered institutional statement on free speech, which supported institutional academic freedom and I have included this as supplementary data to the actual interview. The following is an excerpt from that statement:

The wider freedom and flourishing of our society benefits from pluralism, that is, a variety of worldviews jostling for allegiance and engagement, and also a variety of institutions from which to choose. So long as entry into those institutions is taken freely and that people can exit freely, there is no reason why some universities cannot be a religious foundation and give particular attention to how their worldview contributes to the academic endeavour and the priorities they address. (SM4)

However, whilst this institution might prioritise its Christian commitment space was made for alternative views. For example during our interview SM4 talked of ‘creating a climate to disagree seriously, but co-operate’ and stated that he ‘felt it was important that alternative voices are heard among those who are in Christian education.’ (SM4)

Interestingly, there was evidence from one senior manager speaking from a committed Christian viewpoint who felt that his academic freedom to express his views freely was constrained by the institution in which he had worked.

At my previous institution I was much more constrained. Because in that situation I found that I was expected to say certain things which I didn’t really believe in and I wasn’t allowed to express opinions to members of the council because there was a the line coming from management in which they didn’t want anything else heard by the council and that was to do with the nature of the university and the fact that it had a particular foundation which I actually supported because it was a Christian foundation but the leadership at the university wasn’t at all happy about that. (SM2)

Regarding institutions with a clearly defined faith-based ethos, a professed Christian academic (A15) considered that there could be tensions between the meanings of academic freedom that were established within such an institution and those of academics that brought a different conception of academic freedom into the institution.



Once you have an institution that has a clearly defined ethos I think that that ethos will affect what academic freedom means in that place. If you get somebody who tries to work within that place, wanting to apply academic freedom from somewhere else, operating in an entirely different way then there are going to be problems. (A15)

Further potential conflict was also described:

I think also it is possible that a given foundation may actually repress or keep out certain Christian viewpoints or stances because those viewpoints or stances are broadly unacceptable to the people who have the main power in that college or university. (A15)

Academics (A7), (A13) and (A19) did not feel that their academic freedom had been restricted in any way.

No. I have never felt that there wasn't an atmosphere where you couldn't say what you felt. (A7)

I remember going back two decades, coming for interview and in my mind it was a concern and would it be constrictive, but it wasn't it didn't feel it. (A13)

No, I haven't experienced any at all. (A19)

Whilst commenting that no constraints had been experienced whilst working at the institution academic (A17) felt that conversely there was also no mechanism to promote certain issues.

I certainly don't find any constraints. There is nothing because we are a Church foundation college that says that I can't, for example, wholeheartedly support the equality and inclusion of women and gay and lesbian people etc. There is nothing that acts as a disciplinary mechanism, but I don't think there is anything that is particularly a facilitation mechanism either. (A17)

One senior manager expressed the perceptions and presumptions by other academics from secular institutions that the faith-base might be restrictive.

I accept that for some people interpreting a faith base may mean they see it as constraining academic freedom. (SM2)

A further two respondents, (A19) and (SM22) commented that this might also be the case with issues of sexuality, but that they were unfounded.

We did have counseling courses from another university, worried about coming to (name deleted) because they do a lot on gay and lesbian interests. Before they came they were worried about how that would fit it to the university, and yet there has been no, they say they haven't found any issues. (A19)

Actually honesty, integrity is really important. It is quite interesting that people on the outside don't always see that. We had a validation a couple of years ago when the external on the panel assumed, because obviously in a validation you only see a little bit, he assumed that we would not cover sex and drugs and things like that. (SM22)

The faith-base in some institutions might, therefore, not be so influential in constraining academic freedom as some might fear and this was also evident from one academic's observations about certain curriculum areas which ran contrary to the institutions' faith foundation. Although, there were concerns at senior management level, nonetheless no action had been taken.

There are areas and pockets of curriculum in certain areas to degree programmes, that would be considered directly contradictory to the Church's interpretation of those issues, and regardless of what anecdotally, I understand that various senior members of management are unhappy with, sorry rephrase with uncomfortable with, it has been operating for many years and continues to do so, so there is a degree of tolerance there. I would say. (A11)

Regarding the curriculum, during one interview it was apparent that the institution was concerned to keep control over the content of degree courses and ensure that they reflected the Church's mission, which could be academically limiting, but this was the only example of this kind in the data.

(When validating courses) We are required to have reference to the institution's mission statement and the institution's mission statement is strongly sectarian. We are required to demonstrate that our proposed programmes, degree programmes, have, live out the college's mission statement - the institution's mission statement, and the institution has ensured that mission statement is sectarian. The sectarian identity is very firmly placed right at the front. (A12)

One academic (A10) did not identify any overt personal restraints that he had experienced at his university, but rather felt that the institution as a whole was risk adverse. 'I am not sure quite where our institution stands. I feel it would be more cautious about anything that was controversial. If it is not controversial, then I think we have all the academic freedom in the world.' (A10) He qualified this statement, saying that it was an impression and that he had to be careful, but later returned to the subject stating:

So I think that actually it doesn't easily promote academic freedom in a very obvious manner. I think it would be very happy for researchers and tutors to explore any idea that wasn't controversial and then they say, 'Well you have academic freedom to talk about the price of eggs or anything like that.' (A10)

There were instances, however where individual academics had experienced professional conflicts and difficulties in relation to certain research interests which their institutions regarded as controversial.

A1 reported how his Vice Chancellor brought him to task, albeit informally, for taking part in a social and political science debate where he spoke against faith schools. It is apparent that there was some objection to an alternative, critical view of faith schools being aired in public by an academic member of staff. The Vice-Chancellor seemed to imply that employment in a faith university implicitly entailed a censure on debate about faith schools.

I hear you have been speaking out against faith universities because you know that when you came here you were asked whether or not you were willing to work in a faith university.’ I said “I think you have been misinformed, actually I was part of a debate on faith schools, and it was a debate. But if you wanted to ask me not only whether I took part in a debate, but whether I actually was against faith schools I am happy to tell you that I don’t think they are a good idea, for the reasons I gave in the debate, but I didn’t say anything about faith universities. If you were to ask me whether or not I thought that faith based universities were a good idea I would have to say that I thought they weren’t and now I wouldn’t see that in any way as incompatible with my willingness to take up a post within the university when it was offered to me (A1).

In this example, the Vice Chancellor was concerned with protecting the Christian mission of the institution and was uncomfortable with the idea that any academic within the university might enter into a public debate on a subject that ran contrary to the ethos of the university. The reference to willingness to work in a faith university would seem to imply that to do so implicitly involves constraints on individual academic freedom and an unwillingness by the institution to support reasoned academic debate about issues that might be considered sensitive to the faith mission.

Academic (A8) felt most strongly that the ethics’ committee blocked the proposed research project because it involved a controversial issue.

I put together a research proposal and it was basically blocked by my institution. Not in so many words, but what happened was that they kept saying ‘Oh well we have concerns about this research’. So I would address the concerns and once I had addressed those concerns it would be ‘Oh well we have concerns’. So then, I would re-do it and it kept being thrown back to me from the Ethics Committee, and I kept saying ‘Look this is actually an incredibly straight- forward, traditional, bog standard piece of research. I am going to go out and talk to focus groups and qualitative interviewing and so on. There is nothing weird or odd about this, I am just going to interview people about their everyday lived experiences.’ (A8)

There was a further intrusion on academic freedom in terms of attending an academic conference on the area of research.

I was actually invited to an academic conference on the subject of (deleted) and I was told that I was forbidden to go. (A8)

Another academic (A9) expressed a genuine concern that certain lines of argument discussed in seminars could get staff into trouble with the university hierarchy.

I found myself saying the other day to a class:

I said, 'Just be careful about answering that question', because I have a couple of students who write each year 'People believe in God because God is great.' I said you have got to make a case. One student said 'People believe in God because of miracles.' and I was in front of the class and I said 'Well I must say that you have to be very careful you must have evidence because people find that a lot of miracles are not that well supported.' and I thought I really shouldn't have said that in front of a class as I said essentially miracles aren't real. In any other university I would be absolutely fine saying that. There I thought all the student has got to do is make one complaint, or one person who would make just one complaint and all of a sudden I would get into a whole heap of trouble. (A9)

## **7. Challenges involved in implementing the institution's policy on academic freedom**

It was significant that there were no explicit policies on protecting academic freedom.

## **8. Areas of research or opinions on subjects that might be considered inappropriate for academic staff.**

Seventeen respondents rejected the idea that there might be restrictions on research or the expression of individual opinions in relation to faith. No areas of research were identified by senior managers as inappropriate and three examples of responses are included here to illustrate the tone of the replies.

In all my experience I have never come across a single case where there's any decision made on content of the research, or even the approach to the research. As long as it isn't harming people and here we use the ESRC guidelines not Christian guidelines. (SM3)

It depends by what you mean as inappropriate. In the topic as you were talking about earlier? Well, it would have to be something quite

extreme in which case it would be taken as a legal position rather than something else. If we thought somebody was propagating research that we didn't feel was very sound rather than controversial But again it is pretty rare. (SM14)

I would say because we are not research intensive it gives us a lot of freedom you know. You can do what you want. (SM16)

However, five academics identified areas of research that they felt might be problematic. The first refers to topics that could be viewed as unacceptable within a climate of political correctness.

If I offered any opinion as to children being better off with two parents ....it would be perceived as potentially being derogatory to (other family) groups. I fear there are limits to academic freedom in practice because of the way I fear the university might respond. They wouldn't necessarily respond OK let's have a discussion about this. (A10)

Three examples referred to areas of sexuality, which respondents felt could be interpreted as unacceptable within the institution.

I think probably here it would be around issues of pro-life, pro-choice possibly. It could be around issues of sexuality, it could be around issues of spirituality versus mysticism or areas that are perceived to be mystic and magical. (A11)

My research is actually on (deleted). Pretty heavy stuff, and of course as soon as you mention (deleted) the institution absolutely wanted nothing to do with my research. They wanted me to go away and shut up. (A8)

I think there are certain areas of research that – where research touches on people's identity and those identities have been problematic then most certainly there have been problems in the past. (A12)

There was only one example which involved theology:

Well, my first thought on that one is, there are such areas, and then in particular they may be a problem because they are not theological areas. In other words, they could be areas of, I am picking up on specifically areas of Christian research here. It could be another religion where it is not actually the theology department's area. (A15)

### **9. The ways in which it would be communicated to staff that a piece of research would be inappropriate**

Both senior managers and academics identified two mechanisms.

The first, rather informally, through the academic's line manager.

The fact that I had been involved in that debate got back to the Vice Chancellor and so he asked if we could have a conversation. (A1)

Other academics whilst not actually experiencing any difficulties with their work assumed that the process would be informal rather than through some formal institutional arrangement. There appeared to be no formal processes of which individual academics were aware and that if any problems arose academics would be approached by their line managers. Five responses indicated this approach.

In a very subtle way, you know I think at many institutions you would have somebody tapping on the shoulder and say do you think you are the right person to be...is this institution right for you? That may well be something, I don't know – I would imagine that is something that could happen. I think it would be much more informal a mechanism than a process that would operate and, and also I think people would have a degree of self restraint. (A11)

It probably depends on the nature of the research in that the ethics committee would only look at research proposals involving human participation, so that would be one mechanism. I suppose line managers in departments would if they thought that someone in their department was doing something they felt was uncomfortable. Obviously that is not a formal thing. (SM18)

we have no formal process it would be done through the faculties. So they would be challenged. (SM14)

The first thing would be with your line manager or with the ethics commission supervisor – you get some advice, actually this is ..which I think would be quite gentle. If a member of staff persisted

I think it then goes up and you have to go away and explain yourself or one would have to go and explain oneself to the VC. (A10)

It would go through the line manager of the member of staff if we are talking in the generality about research work that was inappropriate. It would go through the line manager and upwards, it could even involve the vice chancellor at some point, but it would be through that matter of the line manager. (SM6)

The evidence from the data suggests that the ethics' committee framework also acts as the gatekeeper in respect of communicating to staff whether or not their research is acceptable.

So we do have an ethics panel, so people who are conducting research actually run their proposal for research through the ethics panel, but that has always focused on general ethics. The ethics of research rather than the exclusion of particular forms of research. (A17)

I am not aware of any direct incidence, but we now have a pretty heavy-handed so called ethics framework..... I am not aware of any policy statement – I am not aware of any discussions. They might be available, but I am not aware of those. (A12)

I think it would probably happen indirectly. I cannot imagine it happening in an obvious way. I think I have got two thoughts, one is that the academic starts encountering opposition through some processes of the organisation, for example, the ethics process, and I think there would be a lot of difficulties being identified from those who are administering those processes. (A15)

A15 continued that opposition might related to problems that caused worry to the members of the ethics' committee, but it is not clear whether those worries were concerned with the faith-base of the ethical processes if the research.

I must say that I think a lot of the opposition that is encountered there is extremely well-intentioned opposition rather than just



malicious. In fact, I have got no experience of seeing malicious discrimination occurring at that level, but those people are identifying problems which worry them, and they are trying to address those with the academic concerned and that can produce some pretty choppy water for the academic. (A15)

Overwhelmingly senior managers identified the ethics committee process and discussion with line managers as the means by which inappropriate research was identified and addressed.

(SM20) ‘Professionally, through clear and reasoned argument by the ethics committee. ‘

The legal thing about policing by the institution what people do largely goes through research ethics. What policing there is through the research ethics and we don’t have to put your research through any committee which says we won’t be associated with this topic. (SM2)

before anybody is allowed to (indistinct) an application to my office they have to be signed off by the head of department. And the head of department is signing to say this research is in keeping with the research plan, in keeping with the department’s areas of expertise and in keeping with the university’s research strategy overall. (SM21)

## **10. Secularisation - institutional growth and expansion**

The growth of the original Church Colleges of Education into university colleges and universities has brought about changes in the curriculum and the range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses. They now draw upon a much wider range of disciplines and many responses during interviews suggested that there was an erosion of the faith-base as the original colleges has amalgamated and expanded. There is a tension within the institutions of the Cathedrals Group, between retaining the Christian ethos which once permeated the former Church Colleges and made them distinctive, and making the necessary changes widening the curriculum and increasing staffing to enable the institution to qualify for higher research degree awarding powers and thus become universities.

As one senior manager eloquently put it:

If you lose the plot, get research degree awarding powers, this that and the other, you do everything necessary to get it. You gain the world and lose your soul. (SM4)

During a conversation about whether the faith-base was visible in the institution one senior academic replied, 'It isn't any more, because we left that when we became a university.' (SM16) Other signs of academics' secularized views of the faith base were: (SM6) 'The foundation has never entered consciousness. You could be there and not know it has a faith-base.' (SM6).

(A7) 'The mission is so vague it can apply to anything.' (A7).

(A10) 'My impression of this place that it is actually a secular institution in practice and it has a Christian history, but it doesn't feature very larger in anything obvious.' (A10).

(SM18) 'I would expect over the next five years in this institution for the Christian foundation and the faith base aspect to the university to reduce in importance.' (SM18)

(A11) 'You have almost a secularisation of an institution, but a desire, not without justification, or reason to uphold a central Christian mission.' (A11)

(SM21) 'All our research is geared towards trying to reach international quality'. (SM21)

Whilst agreeing the importance of academic freedom in research within the university, he stated 'Academic freedom is always on the radar, whether it's got any religious context, that's where the schism would be, in the sense that in terms of academic freedom, we don't judge it from a religious base. (SM21)

SM18 commented upon the evolving nature of the faith-based institutions insofar as the institution had changed immensely since its foundation in the eighteen hundreds. She/he described what she/he thought was 'Almost a tension between the way in which we have adapted over the last few years in a changing higher education environment. Wanting to be lean and contemporary, but retain the sense of history' (SM18)

Responses by two Christian academics also indicated that they had some awareness that their views were amongst those of a minority in their universities and that with the

expansion of the institutions there had been a similar expansion of academics who were not Christians. One senior manager, whilst mentioning that he had particularly chosen to work in a university with a Christian mission added a further comment, 'I am realistic enough to know that I am in the minority for having that motivation.' (SM4)

The following statement by SM2 indicates that to some extent he felt that he was operating in a secular environment within a university with a faith base.

I mean I think that some people would see the bit that I run as controversial well it is and that is why I like it and they might see the sort of university as having created a chair in Christian Education as quite controversial. There are only two of them in the country as I am aware, most of them are in religious education. So that might be seen I think by some colleagues as controversial. (SM2)

SM6 can see evidence of the secularization of staff from the following statement:

Before now, I think all heads of this university will have been Church-goers and I imagine that was an essential part of employment. I don't think that is the case any longer although, I am sure it would be a point of interest. (SM6)

This is an interesting sign of change. What would have been seen to be an absolute requirement for a principal of a Church College would now seem to have been rendered to merely 'a point of interest'.

The difficulties of attracting suitable staff with religious interests would also appear to be making an impact on the maintenance of a firm Christian mission and orientation. Referring to the staff, SM4 surmised that academic freedom was not an issue for many academics, as they were unaware of the faith base and it wouldn't occur to them that it might affect their work in any way.

Many of them would never have thought in any sense rigorous or more than superficial way about what it is to work in an institution that is in some ways different. Many members of staff just think of the institution as the university that happens to be here and, oh yes we are aware that it flies its Christian flag on certain issues, at least some of its senior people do. (SM4)

The demand for the universities and university colleges to be competitive in the area of research is further driving a wedge between the institutions' faith base and their research agendas. One senior manager (SM20) stated that there was no direct connection between the research agenda and the faith base of the university, although he acknowledged that there was some vague indirect link in that there was a Theology department, which had its roots in the faith base. This was reflected in other responses to the question whether the faith-base informed the research agenda where there was no evidence that there were any connections. For example, many senior managers identified what they considered other issues in relation to academic freedom that were unconnected with the faith-base, but nonetheless were raised during interviews. These were categorized as government control over the content of professional degrees, managerialism and funding.

The original function of all the institutions as predominantly to train teachers has latterly meant that there is a great deal of government control of the curriculum in some areas of the university's work. This was clearly identified as an issue by SM 22.

Being an accredited provider of teacher education we have to sign to say we will teach our students the latest policy. (SM22)

This was linked to a culture of compliance amongst academics working in professional schools where the content of degrees is governed by government agencies and regulations. As SM16 commented on vocational degrees within the institution, 'They (lecturers) are trying to produce people who get a job, that's the key priority to get a job, say in a school or a hospital, you have to be compliant.' (SM16). Furthermore, SM16 considered that whilst the university was dependent upon government funding academic freedom could not be protected.

However, the fact that they were teaching rather than research led institutions was seen as an advantage in terms of freedom to research by SM18 and SM3 in that the institutions were not as reliant on income from research funding, as may be the case in larger research-intensive institutions.

We are a teaching led institution and are developing the research base. It may be we don't have quite as much scrutiny of research going on as in larger institutions. Scrutiny in terms of bureaucracy

and pressure I suppose, and maybe that allows academic freedom as far as, just get on with it. (SM18)

The low importance of obtaining research funding in the institution and therefore less pressure on academics to produce quality research was claimed by SM3 as an academic freedom. He/she also compared academic's job security in the institution favourably in relation to institutions that placed more demands upon academics to produce quality research that would be entered in the REF.

If it was the mission of the institution that every member of staff would produce a certain quality of research each in order to arrive at a certain grade in the research assessment exercise or the REF and everybody's job depended on that, then you would have a mission which had a major infringement of academic freedom. We don't have that mission here. In other words, there is nothing in the university's mission at the moment which is imposing a particular behaviour on academics because we have a light touch on research (SM3).

This was not consistently the case for all universities, as whilst commenting on the fact that the institution was teaching-led and that research was seen as important, SM6 qualified this by adding:

But, particularly important is how it supports the teaching programme and might link to consultancy contracts, business engagement and income generation. (SM6)

SM16 indicated that in his/her experience there had been a change in the way the institution was managed since it had become a university as it had lost its distinctiveness, adopting a more corporate style of management.

I think our new university isn't probably any too different from any other university now. It has a group of senior staff who are fairly business focused, committed to the corporate aspects. It's like working for McDonalds or Tesco or something. There is a brand and that has certain requirements from everybody. (SM16)

Whilst SM2 was unclear about how academic freedom was approached within the university and that personally it was not an issue, she/he indicated that there had been

conversations about obtaining research funding and producing refereed articles. Following attention in the press to a recent publication, this academic commented that she/ he had been contacted by corporate communications in the university, and that he/she could understand that in a media conscious world raising the profile of the university was important.

At another university, however, management monitored research time, output and quality. SM21 was quite clear that there were management structures in place to ensure that there were requirements for academics to engage in quality research and that these were linked to differential classifications of annual research time in relation to an academic's research production.

We have categories of research time. We are happy to give you this amount of time over the course of the year, but from a practical management and financial position, we can't not have something back for that time, so what we are looking for is quality research. (SM21)

SM14 differentiated between areas of research that the university would seek to support and other areas that would be 'just for individuals just to pursue in their own way not necessarily the institution' (SM14). He/she indicated that these decisions were strategic and financial, 'the best way to use a resource to get the best value from our research buck' (SM14). Strategic decisions were made 'to support staff through time and resources and studentships' in some research areas (SM14).

How government policy, managerialism and funding affected their academic freedom was less of a concern for senior academics.

SA17 identified three areas that she/he considered were restraints. These were QAA systems, including key skills and pre-determined learning outcomes, the shift in policy to 'an employer focused higher education.....educating students for the workforce for the future' and 'the consumer driven environment with customers rather than students', (SA17).

SA1 commented that academic freedom was severely constrained by authority structures. 'That's been a feature of all institutional life...the more authoritarian and hierarchical an organization is, the more freedom is constrained' (SA1). With reference to the faith base SA1 considered that Christianity and managerialism were mutually compatible:

I think there is a kind of match between conservative Christianity and managerialism which is mutually reinforcing by and large. That conservative nature of Christianity is nothing to do with Christianity, so it's perhaps managerial Christians meet managerialism...because that's the way they would like life to be, sort of run from the top, through an authority structure restricting the way people are able to act. (SA1)

The findings from the responses in the sample of twenty-two academics from thirteen institutions suggest that the faith-base is not a large influence on their work. Moreover, for the majority of those interviewed academic freedom is not in the forefront of their minds in their day-to-day professional lives. However, there are a significant number of academics, amongst the relatively small numbers in this research, who have experienced infringements of their academic freedom that relate to working in a faith-based institution. At the same time, whilst not considering the faith-base as an overt constraint on academic freedom, there is evidence to suggest that managerialism, pressures on funding and the influence of government policies are other factors, which potentially influence and constrain academic freedom.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

The main question addressed in my thesis is ‘How is academic freedom conceived and addressed within the Cathedrals Group of Christian higher education institutions in England?’

Much of the literature concerning Christian higher education, academic freedom per se and the tensions between academic freedom with regard to institutions with a faith base is concerned with perspectives in the United States and there is a long history of scholarship in this area. Whilst scholarship in the United Kingdom is influenced by American literature, there are an increasing number of academics whose focus is upon Christian higher education in the United Kingdom. Astley et al (2004), Arthur (2006), Sullivan (2008) and latterly Cooling (2010) emphasise the importance of including a Christian perspective in the academy.

There is a deep tension in the academy with regard to academic freedom and institutions with a faith base in the United States. Academic freedom is a particular recurring theme in literature debating the merits and demerits of faith based institutions and whether their presence in higher education should be supported or indeed adds another dimension, which is lacking in this predominantly secular sector of education. Arthur’s (2006) reflections on the relationship between religion and higher education comprehensively addresses this debate in the USA, but also expands the scope of the enquiry to include European and British institutions and identifies the sensitivity that exists between ‘the academic freedom of students and staff and the religious principles operative at an institutional level in religiously affiliated institutions.’ (p.113) American academics supporting the presence of Christian institutions in higher education are overtly sensitive to assertions that academic freedom is compromised in colleges and universities that have a faith base, and in particular, statements by critics that because they place limitations on academic freedom, they are in some way inferior to their secular counterparts. This claim essentially stems from the AAUP’s (1940) statement and is viewed as detrimental to the



reputation of faith-based institutions by academics in the USA who defend Christian higher education.

The Cathedrals Group represents a greatly diminished number of former Church of England, Catholic and Methodist Teacher Training Colleges that have survived cuts and amalgamations to the present day, where the great majority now have university status. It could be assumed, that in order to preserve their Christian distinctiveness in the market place of higher education, these institutions would seek to emphasise their historical relationship with the Church and their Christian mission and that therefore there would be similar implications with regard to limiting academic freedom that are so comprehensively addressed in American academic literature. In relation to Christian universities in Europe and universities with a faith base in the United Kingdom Arthur (2006) also defends and articulates a particular perspective on academic freedom, which legitimises certain restrictions in terms of protecting the mission of the institutions. There is evidence from the data obtained in this research indicating that for some academics their academic freedom was compromised and that this related to the faith base. Although such instances were far from common in the sample of the academics interviewed, it must be acknowledged that this was within a relatively small sample and there quite possibly may have been other instances that were beyond the scope of my enquiry. The defence by Christian academics against accusations of infringements of academic freedom, that academic freedom operates differently in Christian institutions and limitations are legitimate does not overtly manifest itself within this research on the English faith based institutions, which comprise the Cathedrals Group. On the face of it from the review of literature, there is an incompatibility between academic freedom and institutions with a faith base, but any such tensions were not overwhelmingly consistent with the evidence from my research.

I believe there are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, for the vast majority of academics in this research, academic freedom was not a high priority in their working lives and neither was it a priority at an institutional level, as, for example there were no identified policies addressing academic freedom. Secondly, again for the vast majority,

there was a lack of awareness or engagement with the faith base, or that it might make any difference to their work. Whilst for two academics the faith-foundation was a positive factor in their research, there was no evidence that any other academics considered that their institutions were in any way different from other secular universities.

There was clear evidence within the sample in the research that academic freedom that for the majority of the participants, academic freedom had a low profile. Only four senior academics were able to articulate a robust stance on their conceptions of academic freedom. Two of these were outright advocates of free speech, but only one academic related their position to the faith-based mission of the university. Academic freedom, either Christian or otherwise, was barely a consideration for the majority of senior academics within these institutions in relation to their teaching and research.

There have been endeavours to raise the profile and stress the importance of academic freedom in the academy, as in the special edition of the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (2009), with contributions from Barrow; Bradley, Fuller, Karran, Harris and Hayes. However, literature on academic freedom in the United Kingdom is not as prolific, nor does it have the high profile that is apparent in the USA, where the development of academic freedom has been carefully documented. Contrary to the powerful professional support academic freedom has in the USA, the United Kingdom has no long-standing historical equivalent of the Association of American University Professors, which has promoted and protected American academics in terms of free speech, academic freedom and tenure since its inception in 1915. Whilst European Universities have the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (1998) which addresses academic freedom as one of its four core principles, and the University and College Union has addressed academic freedom issuing a statement in (2009) these were not mentioned by any of the participants and therefore there seems to be limited awareness of national or European initiatives. My findings indicate that the importance of academic freedom, and that it might be under threat and should therefore be protected was not an issue for the majority of the participants in my research. There was no mention of these organisations,

during the interviews with any of the participants and definitions of academic freedom were vague with only a few notable exceptions, reflecting Hayes (2009) observation about the ‘relative disinterest of academics, particularly those now designated a professor of ‘higher education’ in writing and researching about academic freedom (p. 125). Whilst academic freedom might not have a high profile across the university sector as a whole, it could be expected that there would be some recognition of potential conflicts in institutions with a faith base in the United, Kingdom, but there was little evidence of this in my study. It is significant that only one institution had addressed the matter in any depth and given consideration to notions of free speech in connection with the mission of the institution. It might be expected that institutions espousing a connection to a faith base would be aware of the potential conflicts with academic freedom discussed in academic literature and seek to address these. The low priority to address academic freedom from an institutional perspective across the institutions was evident from responses during interviews indicating that participants were not aware of any written policies related to academic freedom. Either there was no perceived conflict between academic freedom and the faith base in these institutions, there was a potential for conflict but this was not addressed publicly, or the faith base was so weakened that it had become irrelevant.

That there were no policies indicating that academic freedom should be addressed in relation to the faith base was of course a positive freedom for the academics in the institutions. However, the majority of the academics’ perception of the insignificance of the faith base rather undermines the rationale for the Cathedrals Group, as being a distinctive sector of higher education institutions with a special connection to the Church.

The most conspicuous difference between the findings in my study and the literature on the subject was the degree to which the faith base was influential to the life of the universities and university colleges. The evidence collected indicated that support for the importance of a Christian perspective in higher education was rare, but there were two very positive endorsements. Academic (SM2) clearly celebrated the opportunity to integrate his faith into this work: ‘To me it’s a breath of fresh air for someone like me to

bring my faith into my thinking and to be able to be an affirmed member of the institution and experience academic freedom in a way that I don't in other environments.' Academic (SM4) 'I chose this university because of its Christian mission and it was for me a plus' also stated a strong commitment to Christian higher education. However, this was followed by the acknowledgement, 'I am realistic to know I am in the minority for having that motivation.' (SM4) Whilst there were a small minority of academics who professed to be Christians and acknowledged that their Christian worldview had a bearing on their academic endeavours the vast majority were keen to assert that they were not of the Christian faith, even though this was not an interview question. Participants were not hostile to the faith base, but neither was it a consideration, with a few minor exceptions, in relation to their everyday lives within the universities and university colleges, including teaching, research and scholarship. It was not possible to discern how in any way the faith base informed research except in general terms and therefore there were virtually no restrictions on academic freedom nor was academic freedom incompatible in any way with the faith-base. What is significant to this research is that Arthur (2006) identifies the adoption of 'secular notions of academic freedom' (p. 139) as one of the decisions that leads to the secularisation of institutions. Secular definitions of academic freedom were the norm rather than the exception in the research, suggesting that they were in effect secularised institutions.

The stark differences between Christian universities and colleges in the United States of America and the United Kingdom were identified in Glanzer's (2008) study in which he evaluated the relevance of the Christian identity of nine institutions, which are now a part of the Cathedrals Group. Glanzer (2008) did not focus on academic freedom, but his findings do have some bearing on my thesis and the discontinuity between Christian academics' arguments in support of a contentious marginalised form of academic freedom, which exists in some institutions in the USA, and the apparent insignificance of academic freedom as an issue to the academics working in the Cathedrals Group.

The key to this state of affairs is the gradual secularization of the former Church Colleges of Education, which Arthur (2006) describes as 'the only religiously affiliated institutions

that survived into the twentieth century' (p. 31). Using Benne's (2001) typology of Christian universities Glanzer (2008) was of the opinion that 'there are no orthodox' universities in England which would preclude any constraints on academic freedom to maintain the centrality of the Christian mission. As opposed to privately funded institutions in the USA, Glanzer contends that as the government funds these institutions, based on student admission numbers this means that an orthodox Christian university or university college could not exist in the UK as it would not receive government funding. In Glanzer's view, only one institution in his research would 'come close to Benne's criteria for a 'critical mass' institution and he concluded that the remainder could be categorised as 'intentionally pluralist'.

This research complements Glanzer's investigation of faith-based higher education in the UK albeit with a different range of participants with one significant difference. Glanzer (2008) focused upon the Church of England institutions, which were then a part of the Council of Church Universities and Colleges. His research did not include the three Catholic institutions which are now included in the Cathedrals Group. There is a long history of Catholic scholarship and these institutions have a much more assertive approach to describe their distinctiveness as Catholic higher education institutions. The following is a section from the joint statement in which they describe their Catholic identity published on the Leeds Trinity University's website.

Enabled in our mission by the Catholic vision of spiritual and intellectual truth being part of a single reality, the interchange of which gives new depth to knowledge found in the arts and sciences, professional activities, and every other area of human thought and imagination.

(Leeds Trinity University (2013)

If a special definition of academic freedom depends upon the idea of a shared Christian worldview (Theissen, 2004; Arthur, 2006; Ream, 2007; Hiebert 2010) my research indicates that this was not a shared understanding amongst the majority of the

participants. A significant example of this is the comment as to whether the Christian foundation enhanced research by senior manager (SM3):

I am sure it makes claims in that direction, but it doesn't make any sense to me, because I am not involved in that way of thinking. So, I know that there are claims, but I am not sure that they are – I don't think that there is any basis upon which to claim a special ownership for that academic freedom. I stand outside where that claim would come from – I don't see what is special about it. There are certain things that some people put under the heading of Christian values and I can't see why they are under that heading, they could be anywhere. (SM3)

Responses by senior managers in connection with whether in their opinion research was either enhanced or constrained by the faith base indicated that neither was the case. Thus in this research the evidence indicates that there was a lack of a critical mass of Christians carrying out Christian scholarship and, therefore, a shared Christian worldview which might support a particular stance on academic freedom was not evident.

There is an issue, however, that is important to identify, in that documentary evidence suggests there is a certain ambiguity between, the governing bodies' and senior managements' perspectives in protecting the Christian mission and identifying issues in connection with academic freedom and some academics' recognition that this might impinge upon their work in some ways. The research findings indicated that for many academics the Christian foundation in their institutions was not a restricting factor in their research and for a very small minority it was a positive factor. This may be a result of secularisation as in many institutions the Christian mission is so underdeveloped in people's consciousness that academic freedom is taken for granted but there is a division between the governors' and senior management's desire to protect the Christian mission and an awareness by working academics that the Christian mission might in fact make a difference. As senior manager (SM4) observed, many members of staff 'would never have thought in any sense rigorous or more than a superficial way about what it is to work in an institution that is in some ways different'.

There is almost a division between how the Christian foundation is perceived within the institutions. At one level, there are academics that are carrying on with their research and teaching with scant recognition or acknowledgement of the Christian foundation which this research shows has very little influence on what they teach and research. At a higher level of management and governance there is a concern with retaining the Christian ethos in the institutions that once featured so strongly when they were Church of England teacher training colleges. There is no official documentation available to staff addressing academic freedom, but at the level of the Council of Church Colleges and Universities, in documents such as *A Guide to Governance in Church Higher Education Institutions* (2006), potential tensions have been identified for consideration by governing bodies. These have been described as ‘balancing the right to freedom of speech in an academic community with a faith foundation when the exercise of freedom of speech may be deeply compromised.’ Similarly, a section referring to academic freedom, the document *Mutual Expectations, a Report of the Church of England Board of Education* (2005) reveals a reliance on the arguments for the compatibility of academic freedom put forward by Arthur (2006), Theissen (2004, 2002) and Diekema (2000). The statement is as follows, ‘The holding of Christian values is no more or less compatible with academic freedom than the holding of materialist, secularist feminist or liberal convictions.’ (p. 6) However, there is no evidence in this research that what might be discussed by the Council of Church Colleges and Universities has had any noticeable effect upon academic freedom in the actual institutions. This suggests that there is a discontinuity between policy perspectives at the council level and the reality in action of the day to day research activities in the universities and university colleges.

In the absence of any policies at the institutional level, academics are rather left in the dark as to whether their work might be considered inappropriate. The evidence suggests that if this should prove the case, either concerns would be dealt with informally through their line managers as in the case of the academic who spoke out against the arguments for faith schools, or significantly the ethics’ committee framework would act as a safeguard against research that might be considered problematic. My research indicated

that there were two examples where this occurred and both included topics of sexuality. In neither account was it clear that the objections were based on any ethical problems with the research methodology, but rather the actual focus of the research. With regard to policing research, SA12 considered that the institution had ‘A pretty heavy handed ethic’s committee’.

Of course the curriculum base of these institutions was a particularly narrow one focussing upon professional qualifications and degrees, which such as Initial Teacher Training, are highly restricted by government legislation and therefore the scope of research was not particularly wide. The Cathedrals group represents a group of institutions, which have only attained university status within the last ten years, and three are still in the process of acquiring approval to award their own higher research degrees. The transition from teacher training colleges to universities has resulted in a considerable change to their identities in some cases. The evangelical Christian Cheltenham Training College was merged with a secular institution and was the first to gain university status in 2002 becoming the University of Gloucestershire. The University of Roehampton was the result of a merger of four, Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and secular colleges and became a university in 2004, quickly followed by Canterbury, Chester, Winchester and Liverpool Hope in 2005. Arthur (2006) considers that for a variety of reasons all but one of these universities has erased their former Christian designations in order to attract a wider market within higher education. (p. 57). The necessity to compete with other secular universities and widen the curriculum to include subjects that have no connection to the faith base, have lead to an acceleration of the secularisation of the institutions.

Beyond consideration of how the faith-base of the institutions might affect academic freedom, the findings of my research indicate that there are other factors which were considered by participants as constraints and these were linked to the origins of the institutions and the curriculum offered when they were first formed as Church foundation teacher-training colleges. For example, the focus of the universities and university colleges within the Cathedrals Group still centres on vocational and professional degrees, which are stringently controlled by government agencies. As accredited providers of



training, there are requirements that the curriculum offered to students is in accordance with government policies. The obligation to adhere to current government policy is policed by government organisations such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to monitor compliance. Institutions that are judged 'non-compliant' during Ofsted inspections are faced with restrictions on the numbers of students they are permitted to enrol with ensuing financial implications and future funding cuts. Therefore, amongst those academics engaged in professional training, academic freedom in terms of what they are able to teach, is curtailed by education policy requirements and the possibility of financial sanctions is a strong incentive to be compliant.

The pressures on academics to produce research and teaching to a high standard are identified as one of the elements of 'new managerialism' by Deem and Brehony (2005). The extent to which such pressures were acknowledged by the senior managers varied considerably across the institutions. At one end of the spectrum SA3 considered that there were no institutional management pressures on academics' research output.

If it was the mission of the institution that every member of staff would produce a certain quality of research each in order to arrive at a certain grade in the REF and everybody's job depended on that, then you would have a mission which had a major infringement of academic freedom. We don't have that. (SA3)

That they were teaching as opposed to research led institutions was identified as an academic freedom by some senior managers: 'It may be we don't have quite as much scrutiny of research going on as in larger institutions.' (SM18). Similarly, SM3 considered that as there was, 'a light touch on research', academics were not under as much pressure to attract external funding as in other more research focused universities.

However, there was evidence that many senior managers considered that the advent of gaining university status was consistent with the development of a more corporate style of management and that within some institutions there were unwelcome managerial

structures in place in relation to academics' work and research that had adverse effects on academic life.

This was evident from the statement by SM16:

I think our new university isn't probably any too different from any other university now. It has a group of senior staff who are fairly business focused, committed to the corporate aspects. It's like working for McDonalds or Tesco's or something. There is a brand and that has certain requirements from everybody. (SM16)

On a sliding scale towards full managerialist structures regarding research, it was apparent from one interview that the university's management differentiated between academics' allocations of research time in terms of finance and value for money.

We have categories of research time. We are happy to give you this amount of time over the course of the year, but from a practical management and financial position, we can't not have something back for that time, so what we are looking for is quality research. (SM21)

It was uncommon for other aspects of managerialism to be included as possible constraints on academic freedom. These changes to academics' lives are consistent with research by Kayrooz, Kinnear and Preston (2001) indicating that the debate on academic freedom is situated within the larger debate on the changing nature of higher education and academic work (p. 328).

My findings are consistent with Arthur's (2006) contention that the Church affiliated institutions are becoming increasingly secular, in that the influence of the Christian mission in the institutions would appear to be negligible. There is clear evidence of this in the data from the way participants refer to the faith base as something that has been relegated to the past since the institutions became universities. The majority of the institutions have gained research degree awarding powers and have become more competitive in the higher education market, but as one participant put it 'gained the world' and in so doing have lost their souls.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

Within the academic community, academic freedom is regarded as something that should be protected. In the current climate of changes to the academic environment in higher education in the United Kingdom, even though the 1988 Education Reform Act offers some statutory protection of academic freedom, many academics consider that it is under threat. Government legislation has led to rapid changes in the function and management of universities, all of which have had effects upon academic freedom. There has been a mass expansion of the university sector to meet the needs of the economy in what has been identified as the knowledge society, whilst at the same time research funding has been reduced, which has resulted in universities seeking more diversified sources of income. The introduction of market values has led to a higher education system where universities are in competition for students and students are purchasers of education. In order to increase efficiency, managerialist cultures have been adopted and developed with increasing external and internal structures to monitor the quality of academics' teaching and research.

Against this background, the purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of how academic freedom is conceived and addressed within a group of newly established universities with a Church foundation in England, identified as the Cathedrals Group. My subsidiary questions addressed the ways in which senior managers in the institutions understood academic freedom in relation to their Christian mission and explored the views of academics with regard to academic freedom and the faith base. Further questions sought to achieve an understanding of how academic freedom was ensured in relation to research, how any conflict was negotiated and, if there were any formal or informal restrictions, how these were justified by those in positions of authority. Finally, I was interested to discover whether the faith-base enhanced academic freedom for academics in the institutions, or in the wider academic community.

My literature review has established that there is a well documented tension between secular definitions of academic freedom and faith-based universities and colleges in the USA with arguments for and against discussed by many prominent academics. It could be assumed that this tension might be mirrored in the English Church affiliated institutions, in that the Cathedrals Group of universities and university colleges are committed to maintaining a Christian mission and presence in higher education, and that in doing so there could be restrictions on what academics researched and taught.

Analysis of the empirical data from the interview sample across a range of institutions within the Cathedrals Group shows that there was evidence that the faith base of the institutions had led to some restrictions on academic freedom. Three senior academics reported experiences which they identified as constraints on their academic freedom that they explicitly identified as relating to the faith base of the institutions in which they worked. However, these examples were not typical across the data base and there were no other reports of infringements of academic freedom from senior academics or senior managers. Whilst it might be argued that senior managers would be hesitant to disclose any information about infringements on academic freedom that might be detrimental to their institutions, it is significant that the data indicated that the faith base was a minimal influence on research as either restricting or indeed enhancing the research activities in the institutions. Only three participants within a total of twenty-two academics interviewed felt that the faith base enhanced their academic freedom inasmuch as they were enabled to integrate issues of faith into their academic work at their universities. For the majority of the academics, there was minimal engagement with the faith base.

There is the potential for academic freedom to be compromised if the faith base is expressed within narrow terms and is a predominant influence on academics' work, but the data gathered in relation to the influence of the faith base in this research, across a range of institutions, shows that this was not the case. Analysis of the data indicates that the faith base is a declining influence within the institutions and they are becoming increasingly secularised. The data shows that there were examples of a small number of academics that experienced constraints, but within the Cathedrals Group as a whole these

were the exception rather than the norm and, therefore, academic freedom has not been seriously compromised by the faith base of the institutions. The majority of those interviewed had not experienced any tensions between the institutions' faith base and their academic freedom

There are two possible explanations for this. The first is that as the institutions have achieved university status, they have become increasingly secularised and distanced from their original Christian mission. The result of this transition and expansion is that for most of the academics the faith-base is no longer an important consideration in their work, either in teaching or in research. The second is that the majority of the academics had not given much thought to the concept of academic freedom in relation to an institution with a faith-base. The general lack of engagement with issues of academic freedom is in one respect encouraging in that there was little evidence to suggest that academics felt in any way unable to pursue their research interests. On the other hand, in terms of the status of academic freedom with regard to the wider academic community, it is discouraging that academic freedom in any form was not a high priority for the majority of the participants in this research. However, this lack of interest and engagement with their rights to academic freedom may not be peculiar to academics in faith-based institutions.

Despite the formation of the Cathedrals Group and, at the higher leadership level, a commitment to mutual support for a Christian presence in higher education, this is not reflected in the views of the academics in my research. Within the great majority of the institutions, the evidence indicates the commitment to the Christian ethos is weak and relegated to a small number of academics within a similarly small number of institutions. The name, Cathedrals Group, is one way of indicating that these universities are in some ways different and have a shared Christian heritage, but the Christian ethos has, within the context of my research, little impact on research, teaching or academic freedom, either in a restricting or an emancipatory sense.

Evidence from senior managers indicates there are other overriding aspects of developing managerialism that they consider are constraints on academic freedom beyond any consideration of the faith base. In this respect, the Cathedrals Group is subject to government financial constraints as are all universities, and the adoption of more managerial organizational structures to increase financial efficiency is developing. There is an indication from the data that there is a growing imperative to seek additional funding from research and knowledge transfer as the institutions seek new ways to generate income. These constraints apply to all universities, but from the senior managers' responses in this research, appear to be relatively recent developments within the Cathedrals Group. However, there were inconsistencies in the data as to the extent to which managerialist practices had been developed amongst the institutions. At one end of the spectrum a senior manager seemed to feel that his university was somewhat shielded from the pressures to produce quality research, but another was quite clear that there were structures in place to monitor and assess academics' research in terms of quality that were linked to differentiated allocations of research time based on individual performance.

With the drive to achieve university status and compete within the higher education market, the Christian foundations upon which these institutions were first founded have been largely eroded by the need to expand the types of degrees offered and the demands of the market to be attractive to larger numbers of students. The members of the Cathedrals Group are, in effect, institutions in transition where the Christian values are at risk of being subtly eroded by financial imperatives to enable them to survive in the higher education market. This research indicates that managerial cultures are being adopted and their well-documented effect upon academic freedom will increasingly impact upon the institutions representing a more subtle effect upon academic freedom

However, this research has been carried out at a particular time and it cannot be assumed that change will not take place in the future. Furthermore, although flying under the banner of the Cathedrals Group the institutions are not a homogenous group and the links with their sponsoring churches may be stronger in some institutions than in others. For

example, as I identified in my discussion, the three Catholic members have issued a joint statement of their shared Catholic identity thus making a clear distinction between themselves and the other universities in the group.

Since the start of my research, the drive for university status has been swift and now all but one of the institutions in the Cathedrals Group have achieved university status; with many, but not all, achieving their own higher degree awarding powers. Historically, the English faith-based institutions have demonstrated the ability to adapt, develop and take advantage of opportunities in order to continue their presence in higher education and survive great periods of change. Whilst I have identified secularisation as a possible reason for the low profile of academic freedom in relation to the faith-base, there are signs of a regeneration of the Christian aspect of some of the institutions.

Benne suggests that ‘the animating religious vision of the college or a university can be bolstered by funding institutes, centres, endowed professorships, and staff positions that deal with the themes and practices of its sponsoring tradition’ (2001. p. 205). In this respect, the voice of Christianity in relation to higher education in England is not completely silent or without influence. In 2012 Dr. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time and Chancellor of Canterbury Christ Church University, addressed the inaugural conference of the Colleges and Churches of the Anglican Communion. In his lecture, he reflected on the definitions of a Christian and an Anglican university, indicating that the question as to whether it is possible to realise a Christian university in the United Kingdom is still on the agenda.

It is evident that in some institutions there is a resurgence of a commitment to Christian education at the higher degree level. In partnership with the National Institute of Christian Education Research, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee celebration of the founding of Canterbury Christ Church University as an Anglican institution of teacher education, the university has established a new Doctorate in Christian Education degree. In this entrepreneurial manner, they are developing the university’s vocational roots at the doctoral level and producing a marketable product to attract a particular type of student.

In the promotional literature the aim of the degree is described as, not only bringing together educationalists who are interested in developing their own professional knowledge and expertise, but is an invitation to potential students to join a project that will focus on regenerating an interest in the contribution of Christianity to education. Liverpool Hope University has a long-standing centre for Christian education and offers a similar degree. Although there seems to be a groundswell of increased interest in maintaining and increasing the Christian aspects of their degrees in some institutions, at the present time this only represents perhaps the ‘green shoots’ of change.

In the private sector of higher education, there is also the possibility that an English Christian university could be developed in the future, as there are plans to establish a Catholic University College in the United Kingdom. In a similar way in which A. C. Grayling has been instrumental in developing a private liberal arts style university, the Benedictus Trust is also seeking to re-establish the liberal arts tradition within a privately funded college that is faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

To return to my original research question ‘How is academic freedom conceived and addressed in Church affiliated universities and university colleges in England?’ The findings of this research indicate that within the member institutions of the Cathedrals Group surveyed there were academics that had experienced constraints on academic freedom in their professional lives, but this was not a recurring problem across all the institutions in my sample. Responses from the majority of the senior managers interviewed, describing how academic freedom was addressed within their institutions indicated that they considered that the faith base was a historical aspect rather than a live issue at the current time, and that managerialism represented a greater threat. The empirical evidence suggests that the nature of English faith-based universities in relation to the Church is somewhat ambiguous and the responses of academics and senior managers surveyed in relation to whether the faith-base was an influence on their work indicate that the institutions are becoming increasingly secularised. Very few respondents identified themselves as committed Christians and this is a possible explanation as to why the faith base was not an important focus in their work or how they perceived their



universities within higher education. My research indicates that as they have developed and diversified the influence of the faith base has diminished in importance and their approaches to academic freedom are similar to and with the same pressures as secular universities.

The members of the Cathedrals Group are the only faith-based state funded higher education institutions in the country, but in this relatively small-scale study, the findings in my research suggest that the level of support for the institutions' faith-base amongst academics is restricted and that, although in some institutions there were examples of faith based constraints on academic freedom, this was not consistent across all institutions. This lack of engagement with the institutions' faith base was prevalent across the sample of senior managers and the vast majority of the academics that were interviewed.

In conclusion, what emerges from my research is that the issues in relation to academic freedom in faith based English universities and university colleges are more complex than the assumption that the faith base is an overt threat to academic freedom. The coalition of institutions within the Cathedrals Group has diverse historical roots which have shaped how they have developed and grown into the institutions they are at the present time. Many of the Church of England affiliated universities are becoming increasingly secular whilst the Catholic universities and university colleges are holding more faithfully to their Catholic foundations. This is clear from the joint statement by Leeds Trinity University, Newman University and St. Mary's University College in which they clearly identify their Catholic purpose as institutions of higher education and how this influences their scholarship. Despite publicity in the past raising questions as to whether academic freedom might be constrained in faith based institutions, there is no consistent evidence from this research that academic freedom is seriously compromised by the faith base of these institutions.

These are relatively new universities and the continued development and expansion of the member institutions of the Cathedrals Group has not come without costs regarding other

aspects of academic freedom linked to the pressures on academics to obtain income to fund research, the pressures of competing for students within the higher education market and managerial cultures that have been identified as a potential threat to academic freedom across all sectors of higher education.

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## Appendix A

### Email to possible participants

Dear .....

I am contacting you to ask if you might consider taking part in my research. I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Education (EdD) at the Institute of Education, University of London, and have successfully completed the first four years of the programme. I am now commencing my final thesis, which will focus on academic freedom in Christian higher education, specifically in the Cathedrals Group of which your institution is a member. My supervisor is Dr Michael Hand, Reader of Philosophy of Education at the Institute, who may be contacted at [m.hand@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:m.hand@ioe.ac.uk).

I plan to conduct interviews with senior managers and selected academics within all the member institutions of the Cathedrals Group. The interviews will last no longer than one hour and all interview data will be treated as confidential. I will personally transcribe recordings of interviews and no-one else will have access to the data. Should you wish, a transcript of your interview will be made available to you prior to analysis and your right to amend it will be respected, as will be your right to withdraw from the research at any time. My research has been through the Institute of Education's ethical approval procedure for doctoral research.

I will, of course, change the names of the institutions and individuals participating in my research. However, as there are only 15 universities in the Cathedrals Group, there remains the possibility that those familiar with Christian higher education in the UK may be able to guess the identity of particular institutions or individuals referred to in my thesis. You should be aware of this possibility before agreeing to participate.

You are welcome to see the interview questions prior to the interview if you wish.

I would greatly value your contribution to my research. If you are willing to participate, or would like further information, please reply to me at [cprecious@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:cprecious@ioe.ac.uk). I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Carol Precious  
Research Student  
Institute of Education, University of London

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions: Academics

1. Can you tell me something about your particular area of research?
2. What is your understanding of academic freedom?
3. Can you tell me how academic freedom is approached within the university/university college with which you are familiar?
4. Are there ways in which the Christian foundation of the university enhances the academic freedom of those involved in research?
5. Are there any ways in which the Christian foundation constrains academic freedom?
6. In your experience, have there been the challenges, with regard to the institution's policy on academic freedom? Can you tell me about them?
7. Are there areas of research or opinions on subjects that might be considered inappropriate for academic staff in a faith-based institution? Why?
8. In your experience, how would it be communicated to academic staff that a piece of research they wished to carry out was inappropriate?
9. Some people argue that a university cannot protect academic freedom and have an institutional point of view. What do you think about that argument?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about academic freedom and the faith base of an institution?

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions: Senior Managers

11. How would you say academic freedom is understood in your institution?
12. In what ways does the university's faith base inform the research agenda? Can you give me any examples?
13. Are there ways in which the Christian foundation of the university enhances the academic freedom of those involved in research?
14. Are there any ways in which the Christian foundation constrains academic freedom?
15. In your experience as head of research, what have been the challenges involved in implementing the institution's policy on academic freedom? Have you had to deal with any difficult cases?
16. Are there areas of research or opinions on subjects that might be considered inappropriate for academic staff in this institution? Why?
17. How would it be communicated to academic staff that a piece of research they wished to carry out was inappropriate?
18. Some people argue that a university cannot protect academic freedom and have an institutional point of view. What do you think about that argument?
19. Is there anything else you would like to say about academic freedom and the faith base of this institution?